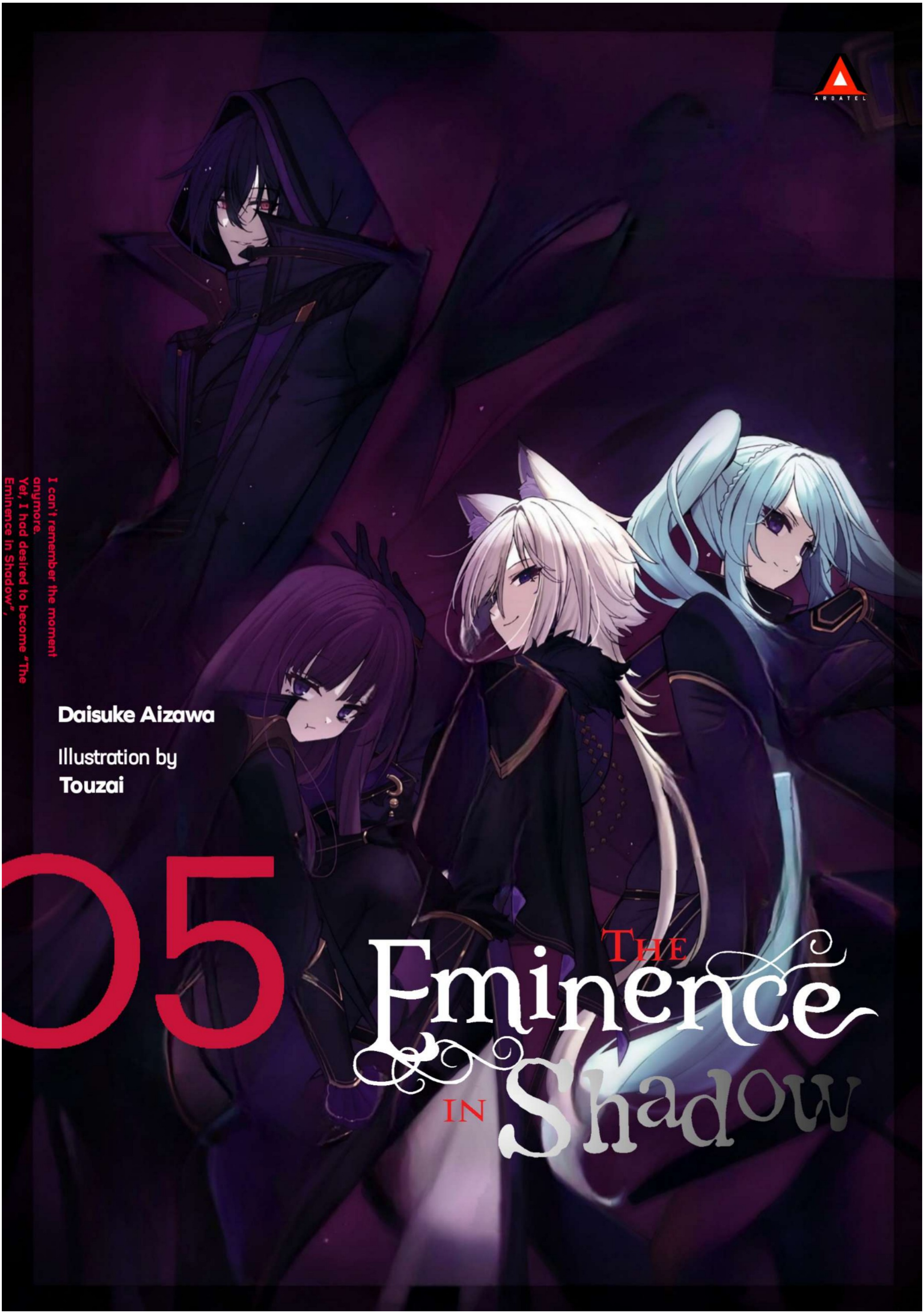


ARBATEL

I can't remember the moment
anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The
Eminence in Shadow",

Daisuke Aizawa

Illustration by
Touzai

05

THE Eminence IN Shadow

The Eminence in Shadows

0

Yes, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow"
ever since I could remember.

Illust: Touzai

The Eminence in Shadow

05

I can't remember the moment anymore.

story: **Daisuke Aizawa**

The Eminence in Shadow

The Eminence
in Shadow

The
in S

“You can bring all the sins of the world with you”

(Chronologically, I was first. Rather, the other side is a rip-off)

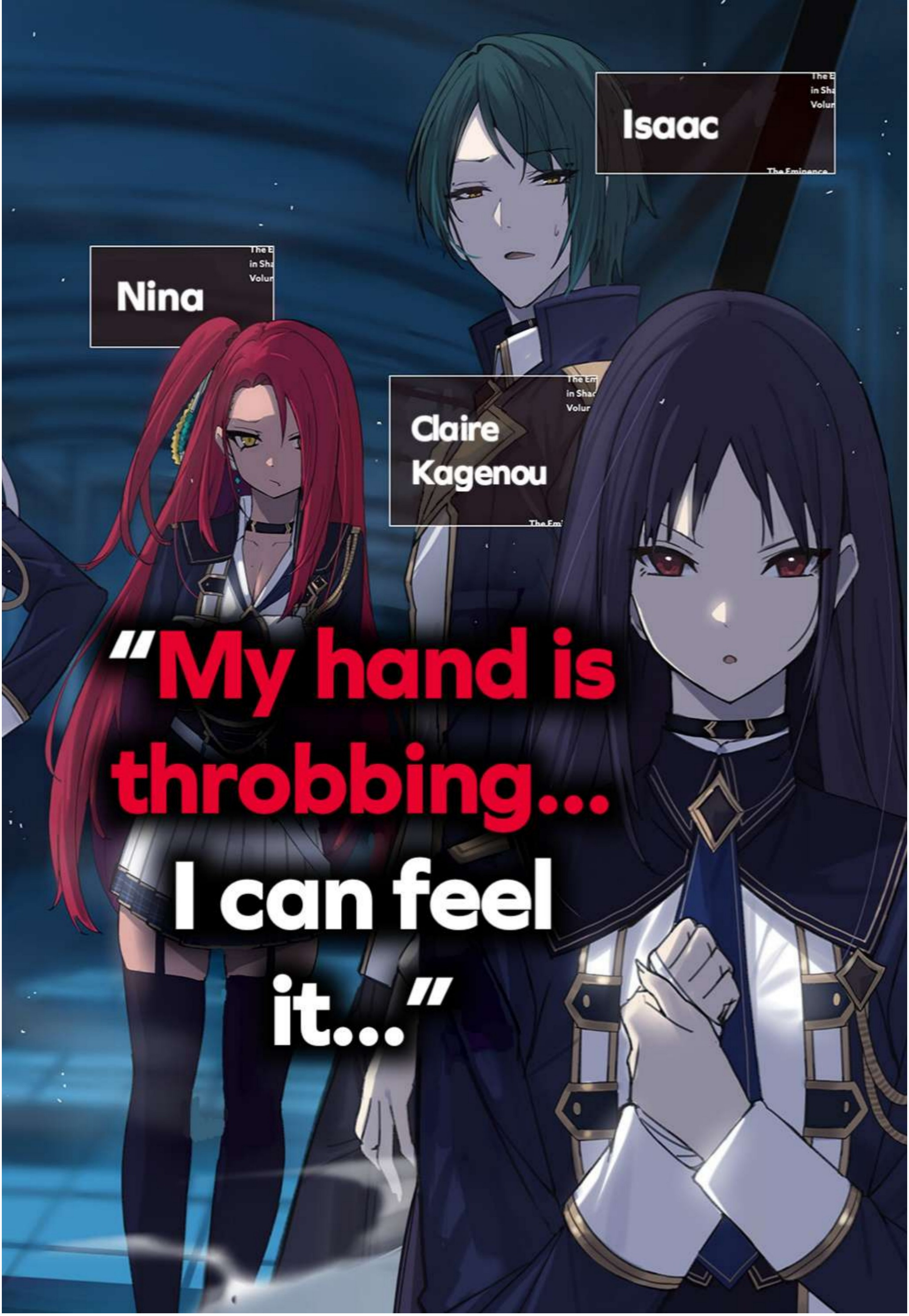
Alpha
Gamma
Eta
No. 664

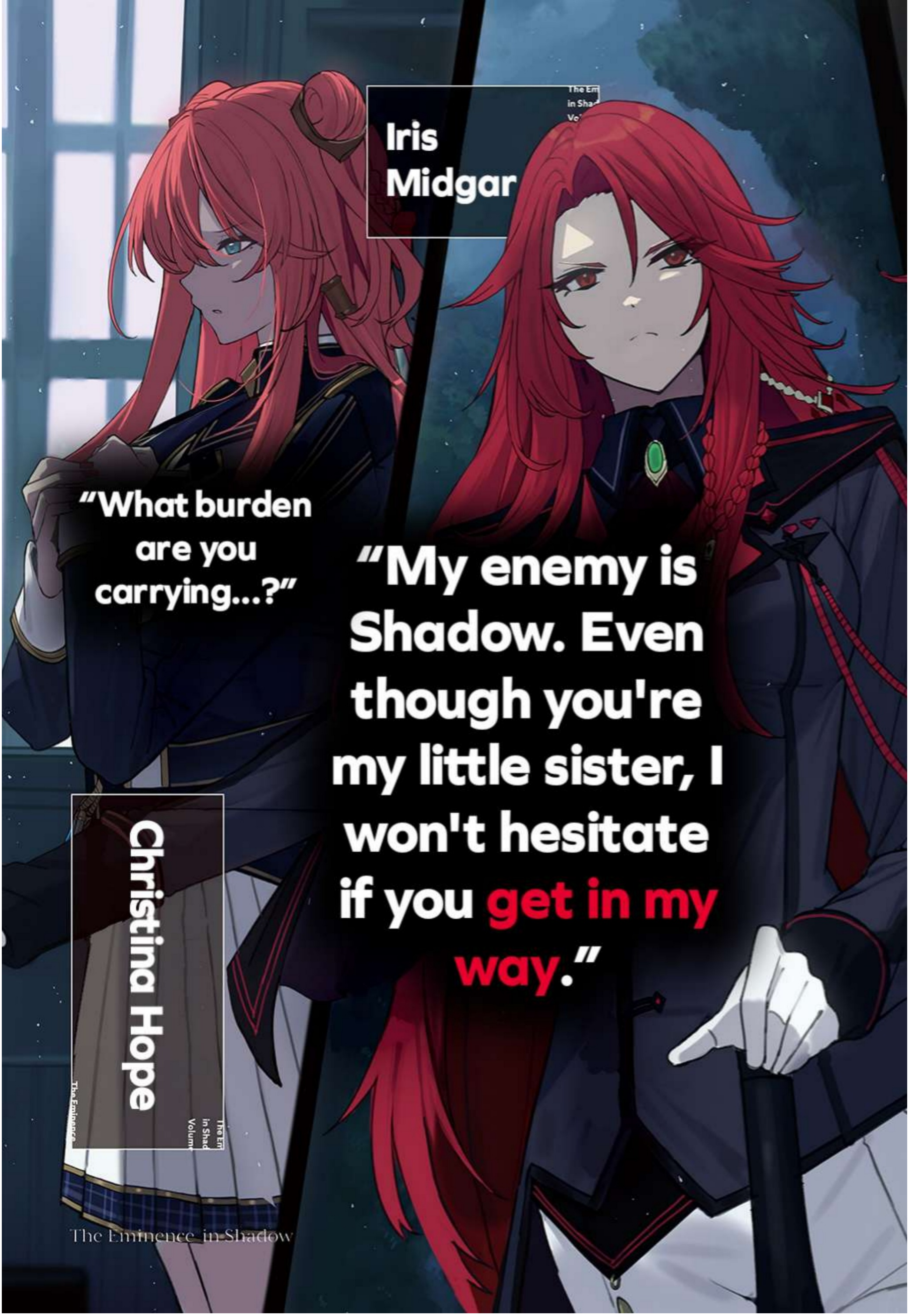
“As long as you are determined to do so, we will never betray you.”

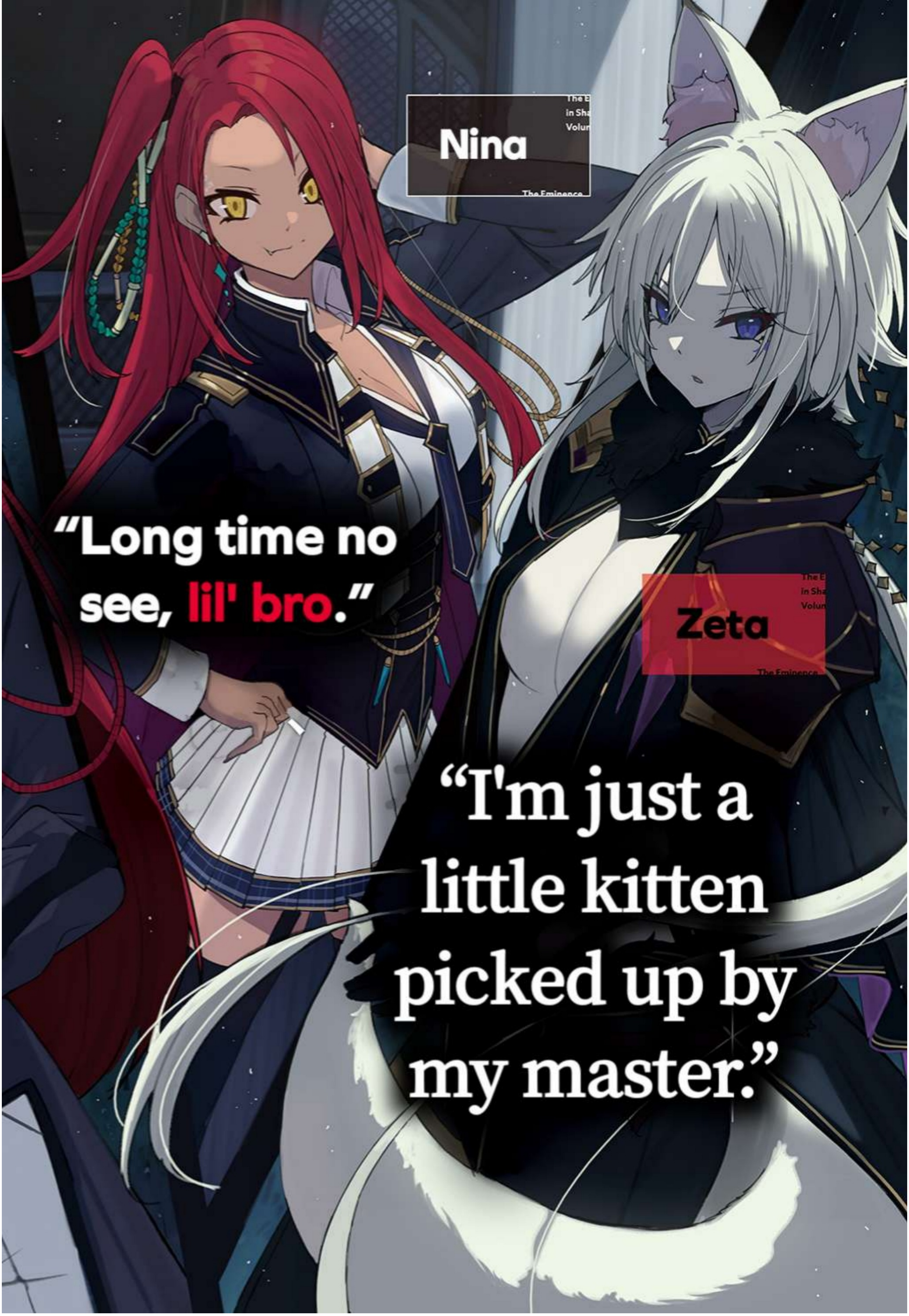
Rose
Oriana
“I will be a strong ruler.”
No. 665

Christina Hope
Alexia Midgar
“If it continues like this, we will only wait for death…”
Suzuki Hope

The Eminence in Shadow


Isaac
Nina
Claire Kagenou
“My hand is throbbing… I can feel it…”


Iris Midgar
"What burden are you carrying...?"
"My enemy is Shadow. Even though you're my little sister, I won't hesitate if you get in my way."
Christina Hope
The Eminence in Shadow


Nina
“Long time no see, lil' bro.”
Zeta
“I'm just a little kitten picked up by my master.”

I can't remember the moment anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow",
ever since I could remember.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his wer.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
[illegible]ed to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood,
"[illegible]minence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

PROLOGUE The Darkness that Lurks in the Academy, Cases of Missing Students!
CHAPTER 1 Nee-san's Return and the Progress of her Illness...!
CHAPTER 2 On a shocking Morning, the School Murder Case!
CHAPTER 3 Case Closed, Let's Talk About Old Tales!
CHAPTER 4 Today the World is at Peace Again!
CHAPTER 5 An Unexpected Terrorists Attack in the Academy Again!!!
EPILOGUE If I Could Get it, I Wouldn't Hesitate to Destroy the World.
APPENDIX

THE Eminence IN Shadow

05

The Eminence in Shadow

05

Daisuke Aizawa

Illustration by
Touzai

Credits

The Eminence in Shadow 05
DAISUKE AIZAWA

Translation by Arbatel
Cover art by Touzai

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Contents

Prologue The Darkness that Lurks in the Academy, Cases of Missing Students!
Chapter 1 Nee-san's Return and the Progress of her Illness…!
Chapter 2 On a shocking Morning, the School Murder Case!
Chapter 3 Case Closed, Let's Talk About Old Tales!
Chapter 4 Today the World is at Peace Again!
Chapter 5 An Unexpected Terrorists Attack in the Academy Again!!!
Epilogue If I Could Get it, I Wouldn't Hesitate to Destroy the World.
Appendix
Afterword

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The Darkness that Lurks in the Academy, Cases of Missing Students!

Prologue

Prologue

The Darkness that Lurks in the Academy, Cases of Missing Students!

"Just in time…"

I breathed a sigh of relief as I left Midgar Knight Academy. My snow-white breath disappeared into the morning sky.

The opening ceremony of the third term had just ended.

"Geez, where were you during the winter holidays, Cid?"

"That's right, the three of us promised to flirt with the girls at Mitsugoshi, you know."

Skel's and Po's mob faces were also nostalgic.

"Sorry, sorry, I have an urgent matter."

My winter holiday in Japan was full of fun events, including the battle for the throne of Oriana, which was also great.

"A lot happened while you were away…"

"That's right, Cid-kun. Your sister scared us…"

Skel and Po said irritably.

"Claire-neesan?"

"It seems like she's looking for you, Cid-kun. I told her I didn't know, but she poked my neck with her sword…."

"I just said, 'You're pretty, let's go on a date,' Then she wanted to stab me in the bum…"

"Oh, I see. Sorry, sorry."

It would be better to stay away from Nee-san for a while.

"Oh yeah, speaking of trouble, the missing former student council president Rose is now the queen of the Oriana Kingdom, causing a stir throughout the country."

"I already know about that."

Fufufu, surely no one would have thought that I was the one who led her to become a ruler.

Behind the birth of the great sovereign was the unknown intervention of the 'Eminence in Shadows'– That person's identity was an ordinary student who was passing through.

This is the real sensation of being an Eminence in the Shadow.

"That's not all. There's a massive monster outbreak in the Oriana Kingdom, or it's like the land is being taken over."

Of course I already knew that.

After all, it's the "Shadow Lord" who gets things done. You never know who's behind the scenes.

"Most likely, this will sever any alliance relations with the Oriana Kingdom."

Hm?

Sever alliance relations?

"That's right! I didn't expect former student council president Rose to go down the wrong path…public opinion will never forgive her."

"The wrong path? Huh? What do you mean?"

"I told you, former student council president Rose sent monsters, killed the heir to the throne, and took over the Oriana Kingdom. She's an evil woman who will go down in history."

"She was a good person at the academy, but I didn't think she would do something like that. She killed her own father at the Bushin Festival, we really don't know what's inside a person, but I wouldn't mind if she asked me to marry her."

"S-So that's it anyway…."

The birth story of the great ruler, who would go down in history, had unexpectedly become the story of a villain.

Well, I guess that's what this is all about.

When an influential person shakes the world from the shadows…an unexpected change of direction hit me, amazingly.

"There's also a bad rumor about the former student council president, Rose."

"That's right, it's said she's connected behind the scenes with an organization called Shadow Garden—"

"Hey, Po, if you keep that up, you'll be in trouble."

Skel interrupted Po.

"Oops, that's right. If I talk any more, I'll go missing."

"Hm? What do you mean missing?"

"Four students from the academy went missing during the winter holidays. Rumor has it that it has something to do with the actions of the organization that previously took over the academy."

Skel, who was making a serious face, said, and Po also said in a frightened voice.

"They'll keep the students in the dark if they try to investigate that organization…"

"Hmm, are they really going to do that?"

"Well, I'm not sure either."

Po turned around and pretended to relax.

"The students suddenly disappeared, so everyone's playing with conspiracy theories. It looks like the Knights investigated just in case, but there's no trace of intruders anywhere."

"It's possible that these guys lost a bet and ran away from reality. They didn't disappear, they ran away. Take care, your money is safe, right?"

"Ugh, well, just barely. Skel, what about you?

"I-I'm…going bankrupt. What about you Cid?"

"I can manage… I think."

"S-So yeah, I'm glad we can all keep living."

"Y-Y-Y-You're right."

"Yeah."

"So, what are we going to do after this?"

"There are no classes today, just the opening ceremony. Shall we play cards in the dormitory?"

"Eh? Cards?"

"This is it! A new product from Mitsugoshi."

What Skel smugly pulled out of his pocket were the playing cards I used to see in my previous life. I never thought something like that would be commercialized.

"Nina-senpai gave it to me. Let's play millionaire or poker!"

"Its Cid's first time playing cards here, so let's teach him the rigors of the gaming world."

"Fufufu… let's play poker then. Let's spend all our money here."

Poker, yes.

Its probably Texas hold'em. Those are the poker rules I taught Seven Shadows a long time ago.

I have good memories of taking their money while half-crying.

Since it's a good opportunity, I'll also ask Skel and Po for pocket money.

I snapped my fingers,

"I accept. Let's learn about the rigors of this game."

"The rate is ten times the usual rate. Let us earn some extra money."

"Humph…."

That's bad, my intentions could be discovered. I quickly covered my mouth with my hand.

* * *

The poker game will be in my room.

The sun had already set and Po looked at the ceiling with a soulless face, having lost all his money.

I had an abundance of chips.

"Raise."

"Guuuh… A-All-in."

Skel bet all his remaining chips.

Of course, I called.

"Kukuku… you've walked into a trap."

Smiling, Skel showed his cards.

"I see. Good move."

"Sorry, Cid. I've learnt all your moves, this is called come back is real."

"—No, it's over."

"Huh?"

I showed him my cards.

"No way… Three of a kind… When you practice with Po, poker seems easy…"

"With a debt that I can still fight, I have to make up this month's living expenses…."

Po muttered something in a hoarse voice.

"Get money, get money."

I collected the money from the two desperate people and shooed them out into the corridor.

"Sorry, I have no business with people who don't even have money."

With that, I closed the door.

From the corridor, "Damn it, remember this!"

"Next time we'll cheat!" in a loud voice.

If that's your intention, I'll reply by cheating too. I cheated without Alpha noticing.

I put the money I got into the 'Shadow lord power piggy bank box' and switched off the lights.

I listened to the sounds of the night for a while.

Then I called out to her from the darkness outside the window.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, you can come in."

"……Hm."

With a short answer, a girl appeared from somewhere.

Pretty good hiding skills. This is getting better and better, Zeta.

She was a slender beastkin in a jet black bodysuit. She looked at me with cat-like ice-purple eyes.

"Long time no see, sir."

"Yes, it's been a long time."

"You've grown up a bit."

"Really?"

"Hmm."

She nodded slightly.

And then, suddenly, she offered me dried fish.

"A souvenir."

"Souvenir…?"

"It's mackerel."

"Ah, it's mackerel, okay"

"I caught it in the sea off the coast."

"It must have been difficult."

"This fish is soaked in its own oil. Anyway, it's the best mackerel of the season."

"I see."

She was a beastkin girl, of the cat race and also the sixth of the Seven Shadows.

Despite her race, Zeta was very intelligent, she also rarely spoke and was very quiet.

She was very different from the dogs I knew.

I accepted the fish Zeta gave me and she kept looking at me.

Like a kitten waiting for its reward.

“Thank you. I’ll cook it later and eat it.”

“Hm.”

Zeta wagged her golden tail back and forth happily.

“Okay…”

Then I put on a serious face.

“So has there been any progress in the search for this case?”

I asked, and then her gaze changed again to that of a polite cat.

“The cult is moving as we predicted.”

“–Hmm.”

I picked up one of the cups by my bedroom window.

As I did so, Zeta moved quickly and poured wine for me.

Her movements were as nimble as ever. Ever since I’ve known her, she’s always loved playing spy, so she’s very good at stealth or even infiltrating all sorts of places.

“They’re trying to revive his right arm.”

“….So yes.”

“Diabolos’ hand will die soon, and the reason for all that is right there.”

“Where is it?”

“We found his right arm sealed in the ruins of the school.”

“I thought so.”

“They were in a hurry. They’re afraid of our interference.”

“Yes, as expected.”

“But we don’t have much time. We must act now.”

After saying that, Zeta looked at me, waiting for me to give the order.

She handed me a document written in ancient letters… I had no idea what it said.

“What about the missing students?”

“We still don’t know anything.”

“There are four of them…”

“That’s right.”

“And there will be more missing…”

“Maybe.”

As we pretended to each other to understand everything that was said, we saw a light switch on in a girl’s bedroom.

“There will be a fifth victim.”

“Yeah… What do we do?”

Zeta looked at me.

“…Whatever.”

“You sure?”

“Zeta, look for it.”

“Hm… look for what?”

“The future… that’s what you need out there.”

“…Fine, if that’s what Master wants.”

An air of mystery flowed between us.

It was a good idea to use that light and connect it to the missing student case to make it more realistic.

Behind all the events that happened at school, there was an evil plan from the Diabolos cult. Zeta and I looked at each other as if we understood.

I nodded, and she nodded back.

“You can rest, sir. I’ll look into it.”

And, along with a gentle breeze, she disappeared into the darkness of the night.

But before she left, she made a gesture that I definitely didn’t miss; she rubbed her tail on my bed.

“I told you, stop marking like that.”

I shook my sheets to remove the remaining hairs and then looked up at the sky.

“What will happen to our wheel of fortune? Eternal darkness? Or eternal resurrection?”

I mumbled that, while thinking of going to bed soon because it was getting late and I wanted to wake up full of energy tomorrow.

* * *

“I swear I will not forgive him this time!”

Claire Kagenou is in her room, in the girls’ dormitory while scowling.

“How many times has he broken his promise to satisfy himself? He promised to come back together during the winter vacation...”

Her face, as angry as a child’s, is lit by the light in her room.

And for some reason, she is holding a metal necklace in her hand.

“I will never forgive him, I will never do it again, I swear I will put this on him and force him to spend the spring vacation with me!”

She moves the necklace, shaking the metal and after making sure that the necklace is securely locked, she smiles.

“This time he will not escape from me.”

But at that moment she furrows her brow.

“....”

The metal necklace falls to the floor, making a very loud sound.

“I can’t control... my right hand...!”

She furrows her brow with a painful grin as she tightly clenched her right hand.

“Why... ? I haven’t felt anything lately.”

But since that day when a magic circle appeared carved into her hand, her hand started to lose control and hurt constantly.

Though lately, these events have disappeared.

“What’s happening... ? Aurora, answer me.”

She tries to call her, but since that day Aurora never returned to Claire.

So for a moment she thought it was all just a dream.

But the magic circle is still embedded under her palm.

Claire opens one of the drawers in her room and takes out some notes.

“This is all I found. I know they carved the same magic circle into the remains of the demon Diabolos.”

The magic circle of the demon Diabolos drawn in the notes is the same as what Claire has on her hand.

At that moment, she felt like she heard something.

She looks up and looks around.

“Eh? Just now...?”

“...un.”

“Aurora?! Is that you?!”

Her voice starts to echo in her head.

“...Ru....n....”

And slowly the voice becomes clearer.

“Run... Please...”

“Eh? ...Run?”

When she wonders about it, she hears the sound of something whirring.

“What is this...?!”

Her vision, the whole space around her is crumbling.

As if it were a mirror, the view in front of her eyes crumbles into pieces, like glass.

The table that she tried to grab because she was pressed for time, was also destroyed.

But outside of the things that were broken, a new world stretched out.

“Am I still in my room...?”

There was no doubt that she was in her room.

But for some reason, the place was filled with clouds.

However, she couldn’t hear anything.

She could only hear her own breath... No, in fact, she managed to hear the sound of clothes moving.

“......Naive.”

In a flash, Claire turned, plunging her elbow into the attacker’s jaw.

“Guakh.” The attacker almost fell to the ground, but managed to hold on and stand up.

But that was immediately repaid.

Claire took advantage of the situation to deliver a punch to the face.

“I learned this from Cid.”

Her skirt swayed with her movements, even though the man was lying on the ground unconscious with white eyes.

“Who is this person?” Claire bent down to investigate the man.

But when she tried to do so, the man’s body began to crumble like glass.

“Just like before...!”

And just like that, the man’s body crumbled.

“What is happening...! Hey! Can anyone hear me!?”

Claire left the room and knocked on the door of the room next door.

But she received no response from the students who lived there.

The same thing happened in the next room, and the next room.

There was no one there.

Claire was the only one here, in this world.

“What is actually happening... Aurora, are you there?”

“No.” A lazy voice answered.

“I know you’re there. Stop joking, this is not the time for that.”

“I already warned you to escape.”

“Are you seriously blaming me? It was all so sudden, I didn’t have time to do so.”

“I don’t want to do anything right now.”

“Too bad because we’re in a state of emergency!”

“I have my own emergency on my hands.”

“What kind of emergency?”

“I don’t want to involve you in all of this.”

“...! And it’s all because of this stupid magic seal!” Claire said that while staring at the magic seal in her hand.

“The magic seal is there to protect you.”

“I know that... But what I mean is that at least explain everything to me.”

“I was planning on doing that, but I can’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, he’s just trying to protect you.”

“Who...?”

“He’s just trying to protect you, to keep you away from all of this so you’re not in danger. That’s why I can’t say anything.”

“That’s what you said last time too. Who are you talking about? I don’t remember being protected by anyone.”

“You’re wrong. He’s protecting you, always protecting you and will always protect you. I admit I’m a little jealous.”

“I’ll say it again. I don’t know who you’re talking about, but I’m sure no one, absolutely no one is protecting me.” Claire repeated her words, this time with anger.

“If that’s your way of thinking, fine. I’m sure that’s what he wants. To keep you away from everything.”

“...If you want to say something, then say it for the last time! And I don’t want any of this either!”

“I will not tell you anything, whatever happens. This is my way of repaying him for his kindness.”

Aurora said that, although with a somewhat dissatisfied tone as well.

“I will make you tell me.”

“How?”

“Hmm...”

Claire thought carefully.

What could she do to make someone who only communicates through the voice in her head listen to her?

“Okay... I will shout endlessly, very loudly until you tell me everything.”

“Please do.”

“I will not listen to you again.”

“As you wish.”

“...I will spread bad rumors about you.”

“And?”

Claire’s face scowled.

“Are you satisfied now?”

” If by satisfied, you mean annoyed, then yes.”

“Relax. I will tell you how to get out of this place.”

“First of all, where am I?”

“I can’t tell you that either.”

“Wow, you’re making me uneasy.”

“First, go straight.”

“I don’t want to.”

“If you don’t walk, you’ll be locked up here for life.”

“Yeah, I guess I just have to walk, huh? Okay.”

“Good, like that. Now make three turns.”

“Three turns?!”

“Just kidding.”

“Someday I swear I’ll give you a proper punch.” And so the black-haired girl walked in a world full of clouds.

And behind her, the figure of a woman could be seen faintly, looking at her with violet eyes.

* * *

Today is the start of the third semester in school. As the end-of-year exams approach, everyone in the class looks very serious.

"Hey, I heard the same question from the magic control theory class today always comes up in exams every year."

"Great job, Agent Jaga, as usual, you're a professional for information."

"But I have to act more seriously now. If I repeat the year, my parents will kill me."

"Yeah, I also have to be a little more serious. I've been too lazy so far."

"But if we study hard, it will be very easy." "Of course, it will be easy."

Hyoro and Jaga's eyes are full of despair.

"Cid, your grades are also low, aren't they? You have to be more serious from now on."

"Aah, you're right. I think I have to do that."

The truth is my grades are below average.

That's because in class, I always train my magic control powers, so in the exams, I don't understand it at all.

But I'm not too worried about that. I can cheat whenever I want and copy the answers if I'm in a rush.

I also don't know what they're talking about in class today, but I know the theory of magic control power is the answer to my theory about compressing magic power will increase its potential x1000.

This is just another part of my training to become the perfect eminence in shadow. And today again, as usual, I go back to training.

But.

The classroom door suddenly opens, and from the other side, a silver-haired girl appears.

It’s Alexia.

“Ah, what a nice weather today.”

I said that, looking out the window.

It was overcast.

I felt the gaze of everyone immediately focused on me.

This is something that always happens. I don’t know why everyone looks at me when Alexia enters the class, and I’m no more than just a mob.

“Hey.”

“Ah, there’s a little bird.”

In the sky is a daily view.

“Look at me when I talk to you, Pochi.”

“The wind brings clouds.”

I wonder, can today pass without anything happening?

“Don’t ignore me.”

She grabs my hand. Then she slowly starts turning my head as my neck creaks with an odd sound.

Alexia looks at me with her red eyes.

“How are you, Princess Alexia?”

I try to greet her in the way most similar to a mob.

"Good morning, Cid Kagenou-kun."

"I apologize for my rudeness, Princess Alexia. But aren't you in the wrong class?"

"No, I'm in the right place. I came because I have business with you, Cid Kagenou-kun."

"Ah, but the next class will soon start. Can it wait?"

"Don't worry about that. I'll borrow her for a while."

Alexia said that to Skel and Po and then grabbed me by the neck.

"O-O-Of course!"

"P-Please, take him away!"

She dragged me away, as I listened to the insolent responses from my two friends.

* * *

"Why is the destination the girl's dormitory?"

"Can I just go in?"

"I already have permission."

"But I'm a man."

"I told them you were a co-worker."

"Co-worker?"

Alexia stood in front of a door.

That was Claire nee-san's room.

"No one has seen your sister since yesterday after dinner."

"Oh."

"It made me curious, so I asked one of the students and she said the room was locked."

Alexia knocked on the door but no one answered.

"I tried to look for her in the places she usually visited, but she couldn't be found."

"Ohhh."

"You don't know anything?"

"No." I answered honestly, but Alexia looked at me as if to say: "Is everything okay with you?"

"And you're not worried?"

"Yeah, this isn't the first time."

"Does this happen often?"

"She always tends to disappear for a few days since we were still small."

"So, you know something about this case."

"Well, yes, that's right."

"So, where was your sister when she disappeared?"

"Don't know, she just came home alone and that's it."

Even though in reality, she was always searched for and found by Seven Shadows.

Zeta should be watching her this time. Zeta is very good at what she does, so if she hasn't moved yet, it's because everything is fine.

"Is this like a runaway from home?"

"Maybe."

“Well, hopefully it’s just that, because there’s actually something else that has caught my attention.”

“What is it?”

“Look at this.”

We entered the room and there Alexia took a metal necklace from the floor.

“A necklace? It looks sturdy.”

“And not only that, it actually has magical effects. This is not something a normal student would have in her room.”

“I can assure you that my sister is far from normal.”

“There’s a possibility that someone entered her room, and then tried to put this on her to kidnap her.”

“But the necklace was dropped here.”

“It probably fell there in the middle of the fight. Also, there’s something else that’s bothering me.”

Alexia looked at some notes lying on the table.

As she saw it, I was shocked by a flash of enlightenment.

“This is...!” Ancient letters, cool magic signs, difficult words that seem to have meaning but don’t.

Yes, I’m sure.

This is a *chuunibyou* notebook.

“Do you know what this is?”

“No, not at all, I’ve never seen this in my life.”

“Really? Why are you averting your gaze?”

"I-I'm just imagining a lot of things."

"I hope so."

Alexia looked at the *chuunibyou* notebook again.

"I highly doubt anything written in here makes sense."

"Are you sure?"

Alexia said that and looked at her notebook again.

I feel sorry for her, but it's no more than a notebook from someone's embarrassing phase.

When you think about it, the necklace also seems like a *chuuni* item, and now I remember, until recently she was pretending to have a magic mark on her arm and had to hide it with a bandage.

Maybe my sister's *chuuni* status finally got out of control.

In addition, suddenly disappearing is another element of *chuunibyou*.

"She's probably fine."

"You trust her, don't you?"

"Trust? ...Well, kind of."

In fact, she just said there's no point in feeling upset.

"Instead, I... my sister and I... " Alexia narrowed her eyes, as if remembering distant days from the past.

"We don't understand each other lately. I don't know what she's thinking..."

"Hmmm."

"Have you ever thought that way, Pochi?"

“Actually, I almost never understand what my sister is thinking either.”

“That’s true... I guess only they can understand each other.”

“Siblings are strangers bound by blood, that’s all.”

“That’s a cruel way to put it.”

“Do you think so?”

“At least I want to understand.”

“Right.”

Alexia let out a small sigh.

“...You can go back to class now if you want. I’ll stay here and do further investigation.”

“Okay.”

I left the place, leaving Alexia alone who was flipping through the detailed *chuuni* notebook of my sister’s embarrassing phase.

* * *

At the end of today’s class, my sister wasn’t anywhere to be seen.

But Zeta was with her so I doubt anything happened to her.

Right now, I’m behind the school building preparing the fish that Zeta gave me. It’s past the time to turn off the lights so it’s all dark around here.

“I think it’s almost ready.”

Sparks from the fire fall on top of the fish, creating a rich aroma and the sweet sound of cooking meat.

“Or maybe I should cook it a little longer?”

Being here alone, cooking fish isn't bad at all. Peace enters my heart. People can enjoy incredible peace just by living their daily lives this way.

As I watch the fire, I see someone approaching at a high speed.

"Bosssss!!!! I finally found you!!!" That person is Delta, who suddenly appears in front of me, waving her tail and ears.

"Hello Delta. It's dark now, so don't make too much noise."

"Boss, I've been chasing the black jugger that you ordered me to chase!!"

"That's right. It's nighttime now, so don't make too much noise."

"And Alpha-sama told me that I did a great job!!"

"Good for you. But it's night time now, so don't make too much noise."

"Boss, I want you to praise me too!!"

"Ohh, yes yes yes, smart girl."

I pet Delta's head and she waves her tail from one side to the other with full happiness.

"But now it's night time, so don't make too much noise."

"Okay, I won't make too much noise!!"

She answered loudly and then closed her mouth.

"Now I'll talk calmly."

Delta said, this time speaking softly.

"Good, that's a good way to talk."

"Thank you, boss. By the way, I've finished digging the hole that you ordered me to dig."

"A hole? Really?"

“Yes, that’s right!” She returned to her normal tone of voice again.

“Ah, okay. Never mind.”

“And I found it! It’s like you said to me, boss!” Delta smiled and then bit the red gem she was carrying.

“What are you biting it for?”

“So it doesn’t get lost!”

“You are the embodiment of intelligence.”

“Hihihi.”

I took the gem filled with Delta’s saliva. It was a beautiful, sparkling gem.

“Oh... it looks like it can be sold for a very good price.” Its size is like a small ball, but its shine is not normal.

“Give me praise!!”

“Oh, yes yes, smart girl.”

Again, I petted her head.

And once again, Delta’s expression sank into a smile.

“I want a reward!”

“Hmm, okay...”

“Hm... there’s something with a delicious smell here!” Delta already holds the fish in her hand.

“Ah, that’s a gift Zeta brought for me-”

“Thank you for the food!” and she ignores me.

“So delicious~” She bites it and then smiles happily.

Well, she does do a good job, so...

“Well, it’s okay.”

At the same time, I hear the sound of plants behind me moving.

“Grrr... what are you eating?” I turn around and there stands Zeta, looking as cold as ice.

“Hmm, what are you doing here, stray cat! This food is my gift!” Delta starts to growl.

“The fish was given to master, not you, you damn dog.”

“Get out of here! This fish is mine!” After saying that, Delta swallowed the fish whole.

“Ah...”

Zeta breathed a sigh mixed with disappointment.

“This is delicious~”

Meanwhile, Delta is completely unaware.

“You damn...” With a “fuuuh,” Zeta took a breath.

“You’re not welcome here, stray cat! If you don’t leave now, I’ll force you to leave!”

“The fish is the tastiest fish I’ve ever found, just for my master... I won’t forgive you.”

“Come on, both of you calm down.”

The situation was already starting to get a little annoying, so I decided to step in.

Then, I was caught in the middle of both of them looking at each other.

“Uhmm... I’m just here preparing the fish, even though I didn’t give permission for her to eat it, so the point I’m making—”

When the situation gets bad, the first thing to do is make an excuse.

Essentially, say and explain the problem clearly and not blame yourself, and all that's happening is not your responsibility.

"In short, I can't be blamed for anything."

"Hm, that's right. You can't be blamed for anything, master."

"It's obvious! Boss can't be blamed!"

"Exactly, I can't be blamed."

I prepared the fish correctly, because others taking advantage to eat it isn't my responsibility.

"It's clear that—"

Zeta and Delta point at each other.

"–She's the one to blame!"

They said.

"Eh?" Their magic powers immediately exploded.

And that shock wave really made me fly.

After dodging the attack and landing on the ground, I saw Zeta and Delta standing a bit far from me.

"I won't forgive you for stealing the gift I brought with love for my master... you foolish damn dog."

"I will never forgive you for interrupting me while I was enjoying my gift... stray cat!"

"Oh, I don't understand anything, but I hope we all agree that I can't be blamed."

I slowly walk away.

They never got along and always lived fighting, and the fight could destroy the house and fields if Alpha didn't come to stop them.

“Enjoy your fight, but be careful not to destroy the surroundings.”

Fortunately, the shock wave made us fly away.

“I’ll rip you apart.”

Delta takes out her sword and took a fighting stance.

“I’ll teach you manners.” Meanwhile, Zeta narrows her eyes... and disappears.

She disappeared somewhere, without a trace.

“Did she run away?” Delta wondered.

But quickly a black sword appeared from behind.

“!!” She barely avoided the attack at the last second.

But it was so sudden that her stance broke and she rolled on the ground.

But the attack didn’t stop, you could hear the sword slicing through the air.

“...Huh.”

But Delta dodged every one of those attacks.

She rolled on the ground, pushed herself, did a half-spin, all impossible movements for a human.

“–Where are you hiding?”

Zeta couldn’t be found anywhere.

Only a group of black swords appeared from the darkness.

This was just like that technique... yes, the queen of blood’s ability.

I didn’t expect her to be able to use it, but now after thinking about it, it’s not surprising either.

She was the most skilled girl I’ve ever met.

She could do anything perfectly, anything and it didn’t matter if she had done it before or not. That’s why her growth was faster than others, and with her good looks, I dare say she’s the most talented girl I know.

Yes, in talent, there’s no one like her.

But even the “Talented” Zeta had a weak point.

“...Hm?”

Zeta said.

You could see her tail even in the darkness.

And she did it again.

Her weakness was that she was carried away by her emotions at the moment, she tended to get bored quickly and that’s why she failed to concentrate on one technique.

“Dammit, I need more practice.”

“—I found you!”

In a split second after Delta’s attack hit her, her tail turned back into black smoke and disappeared.

“Almost there.”

Her voice could be heard again.

“...I’ll take this more seriously.”

After saying that, an uncountable number of black swords appeared from the black smoke.

The swords were around Delta.

“Ultimate Technique—A Thousand Swords.”

A somewhat made-up name given the fact that the number was clearly more than a thousand.

But the power of that technique was extremely brutal.

The swords hit Delta’s body, launching her into the air.

“Gah, gaah, guuh.”

The blades continued to slash Delta even as she flew through the air.

Although her body parts protected her vital organs, she looked a bit dangerous.

It seems Zeta is stronger than I thought...

She was one of the newest in the Seven Shadows, but now she’s a monster due to her rapid growth...

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah.”

Delta’s scream echoed across the sky.

She quickly exploded a large amount of magic power from her body and the black smoke disappeared without a trace.

“Eh...? That’s impossible.”

Zeta, in surprise, fell from the black smoke.

She landed like a cat, right in front of Delta who was covered in blood.

Puff

Delta spat out the blood and then stared straight at Zeta.

Her gaze was no longer the same as before; the game was over for her.

“*Puff!*” all of Zeta’s hair stood on end.

Then Delta used a slime set to create a giant black sword.

No, in fact, its shape was too distorted and large to be called a sword, that’s why I call it a “big iron”.

Usually Delta tries to imitate us, creating swords like the ones we use.

But that’s not the real Delta.

The real Delta uses this big iron, it’s a sign that she will fight seriously and the reason they call her Delta “The Tyrant”.

“Grrrruh.”

Delta started growling.

While sweat flowed down Zeta’s cheek.

Meanwhile, I prayed for the doomed academy and school building.

What about now? If it continues like this, they will truly destroy the entire school.

Although I also don’t want to stop the serious fight, which would make anyone angry.

And unfortunately, my rules prevent me from doing something I don’t want to do.

So, goodbye Midgar Academy. Goodbye Skel and Po, I’ll pray for your souls.

I prayed in my heart.

“You’re done.”

The big iron consumed Delta’s real magic power.

This time I stepped back a little more seriously.

While Zeta... floated in the sky.

Not a metaphor or anything, she just jumped and flew across the sky.

I used my vision to see her better and realized she was surrounded by the black smoke before.

Oh, it can be used like that too.

“See you later, dog.” She said that and quickly disappeared in the middle of the black smoke.

After being stunned for a moment, Delta screamed in anger.

“W-Where do you think you’re going, you lying cat!!”

Then she disappeared into the sky as well.

“Yeah, in the end it always ends like it does.”

Their fight always ends like this without result.

Zeta always ends up escaping, or with Alpha being angry at both of them. Me? I just watch.

Yeah, I can sleep now.

“Hm?” I realized some new presences approaching me.

And also, it would be strange if not with all the commotion created here.

“But these presences… yes, I think one of them is Alexia and the others are the guards.”

I erased my presence and decided to stay quiet and watch.

* * *

Alexia ran through the backyard of the school building.

But instead of a yard, it was a small forest filled with trees and untrimmed undergrowth, so her shoes became dirty with each step she took.

“Both of you, hurry!”

Alexia continued to run while talking to the people following her.

“Alexia-sama, it’s too dangerous to approach that magical power! Let’s wait for reinforcements!”

The staff, the guards, gave everything to follow her.

“If we wait too long, they will escape!”

“Please wait a moment, Alexia-sama!”

She ignored the guards and continued running.

Then, after reaching the place, they found traces of battle.

“What...?”

There were several footprints, trees, and undergrowth that were split.

There were also traces of magical power in the air.

“Who would be capable of releasing this much magic power here...!”

“Alexia-sama! Uh...! What happened here!?”

When they arrived, the guards were stunned to see the traces of magic power.

“It’s dangerous to be here, the people involved may still be nearby!”

“Yes, and it’s your job to capture those involved, isn’t it?”

“W-Well, you’re right, but...”

The guards took a deep breath and looked at each other for mutual support.

Meanwhile, Alexia breathed unconsciously.

“This is blood.”

Then she found bloodstains in the undergrowth.

“There are a lot of it. The person who was here is likely badly injured. Furthermore, he may be the person who caused the missing of the victims...”

She referred to the case of the missing students.

This case has been investigated by the knights, but because of a lack of evidence and some others ignored, the case was closed as unfounded.

However, Alexia suspected that something was hidden in all this.

“At any rate, very strong sword warriors fought here... But what’s not known is why here...?” This is not a colosseum or anything, this is the school yard.

“This is almost certainly related to the disappearance of people. Something very powerful may be hidden inside–”

“A-Alexia-sama.”

Suddenly, the voice of the guards interrupted her thoughts.

“What’s happening now?”

“L-Look over there!” The guards pointed to the figure of someone wearing jet-black attire.

“When did he appear!?”

None of them realized the presence of this person.

“Y-you...”

The person in black bowed and touched his fingers to the blood on the grass.

Then he spoke, with a voice that seemed to come from emptiness.

“So this is the sacrifice of your battle...”

“Shadow...” Alexia was speechless, while Shadow admired the blood on his finger with fascination.

“But what about the lives lost here, is that a necessary sacrifice for the world...?”

“Shadow, do you have anything to do with this?”

Shadow ignored Alexia and the guards, still lost in thought.

“A-Alexia-sama, it’s dangerous to approach! We must call the knights!” One of the guards shouted in a fluster, unsheathing his sword.

“It’s no use doing that. And step back, even our combined swords won’t be able to touch it.”

Despite knowing that, Alexia pointed her sword towards Shadow.

“Answer me, Shadow, what is happening here?”

Saying that, this time he released more magical power from his body, and Shadow snapped back to reality.

His eyes with dark red color looked at her.

“—What will you do after finding out?”

“I will capture you. I won’t let you do as you please in this place.”

Shadow smirked on the other side of his mask.

“Don’t waste your time.”

With that, he disappeared.

No, he didn’t disappear.

In fact, he appeared right in front of Alexia.

“What—!”

She couldn’t feel anything; she couldn’t feel his magic power, nor could she feel his presence.

He just appeared out of nowhere in front of Alexia and pressed the sword to her neck.

His sword? Shadow’s sword? No, but it was a sword she knew well.

It was her own sword.

“Since…when…?” She didn’t even realize Shadow had taken it from her.

“We live in a completely different world.”

“What do you mean?” She said it, while gritting her teeth hard.

She had trained hard.

She thought that now, maybe, she had closed the gap a little between her power and his.

“Like a coin with two sides, like there is light and dark... there is also a world that you must not involve.”

After saying that, he removed the sword and turned around.

He started to walk, going when the wind swayed his black cloak.

“The time has come.”

“Time? Time for what?”

“Time for them to start acting.”

Suddenly, some kind of black liquid spewed from Shadow’s feet.

The liquid rose to his entire body, enveloping him like a whirlpool of water.

And after the blizzard, the liquid turned into black smoke that made Shadow disappear.

The only thing left in the place where he stood was Alexia’s sword.

“He’s already gone… But who are ‘they’?”

There are still many things she doesn’t understand.

But that was progress because she knew Shadow was involved.

A little bit, like a small step.

Alexia thought like that, mocking herself as she turned around.

“Is there still no reinforcements coming? We must quickly secure the scene of the crime—”

Alexia stood there unable to finish her words.

“No...maybe...” All the guards fainted.

In one fell swoop that Shadow made, he not only took the sword away from her, but also rendered all the guards unconscious.

And of course, she realized nothing.

“There is still, still a huge gap between our powers... but someday... someday I...”

Alexia looked down while clenching her hands tightly.

I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
and hoped to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood,
"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence in Shadow

I can't remember the moment anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow"
ever since I could remember.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene,
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,

The Eminence in Shadow
Volume Five
Chapter One

Nee-san’s Return and the Progress of her Illness…!

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Nee-san’s Return and the Progress of her Illness…!

The next day, the school was bustling with talk about the fight between Zeta and Delta last night.

“There seemed to be a lot of magic power visible behind the dorms last night.”

“Too bad, I didn’t know because I was asleep.”

“I also didn’t know because I was sleeping.”

Skel and Po were talking with sad expressions on their faces.

“I heard they’re investigating the scene?”

“Yeah, it seems that way. Some teachers went to help.”

“If the back of the dorm is the scene, they must have planned to enter the girls’ dorm. The killer must be someone who is lewd.”

“No, the scene seems to be in the back of the boys’ dorm.”

“If that’s the case, he’ll break into the boys’ dorm.”

“What’s his goal?”

“Well, there are good-looking guys here,” said Skel with a dirty smile.

“That’s true. There are also good-looking guys here,” said Po with a dirty smile.

“Yeah, there are,” I agreed with a Buddha-like expression.

Besides the two of them, the other students were talking about last night’s incident seriously. There were various theories, such as someone who had a grudge against the school, or valuable artifacts in the laboratory, or who knows if it was related to the missing person incident.

I’m sorry, friends.

The truth is just a fight between dogs and cats. But I don’t mind the atmosphere that something is happening behind the peaceful school life.

“The next class is in the gym, let’s go.”

“Wait, Cid. It’s rude to leave a good-looking guy here.”

“Wait a moment, the good-looking guy is getting ready.”

I ignored them and continued on my way.

But last night’s decision to place Alexia through the movements of a shadow ruler was the best.

The terrible battle that took place behind the peaceful school and I’m worried about where it’s going. The ability to adapt and a realistic arrangement using the fight between Zeta and Delta is a high artistic point.

Then, showcasing my ability further, and showing the difference between the world we live in.

Someone who lives on the peaceful side of the world is not ready to enter the harsh and dark side of the world... I always wanted to play a stylish scene that has existed since BC.

Just thinking about it brings a smile to my face.

My dream of the “best shadow ruler” will be engraved in the history of the world.

“Master.”

Is it just my imagination? Or is that Zeta’s voice coming from somewhere?

“Master, over here.”

"Oops."

It's not my imagination.

I thought I saw a girl with cleaning clothes, but it turned out to be Zeta.

She wore work clothes and a knitted cap that covered her ears to maintain her appearance.

"Why are you dressed like that?"

"I'm in disguise."

Zeta stuck to me and spoke firmly.

"Stop pointing, you'll stand out."

There are other students in the hallway.

"Master, you smell like a dog."

"That's Zeta's own scent."

"Mmm."

I pushed Zeta away with my elbow.

"Oh right, where's Delta?"

"I tricked her. She's out at sea now."

"Okay, no need to discuss it in detail."

Zeta is hard to find when she tries to escape. That's why she can fight with Delta.

"Hmm, come this way."

Zeta took my hand and led me into an empty classroom.

The air in the empty classroom felt cold and dusty, maybe because it hasn't been used for a long time.

"The next class will start soon."

"Report."

She huddled close to me and whispered in my ear.

She still wants to keep playing as a spy.

"The attack on her failed."

"I'm sure of that."

"But she's still out there."

"Yes."

"The cult will send the next assassin."

Zeta moved to the window and looked out.

I stood beside her and we both moved to look down outside the window. In the distance, I could see the Order and the teachers who had investigated the crime scene last night.

Zeta gazed at them with her eyes.

I also gazed at them, mimicking her.

"Maybe it's her."

"So she's the one."

"If she's dangerous, we'll step in."

"I'll leave it to you."

At that moment, Zeta quickly bent down.

I also bent down.

“We’re being watched.”

“Someone has a good instinct.”

“Hmm, she’s hiding in the shadows.”

I hid and looked out, and for a moment I felt eyes focused on me from a distance.

“I want to know what they see... Oh, I have to go.”

The academy bell rang.

When I turned around, Zeta was no longer in sight.

* * *

Lunch break

Skel, Po, and I are standing in line at the school canteen.

“What are we going to eat today?”

“Cid must be happy now. He’s eating a fancy lunch with the money he stole from us.”

“It’s so great for Cid-kun. We’re still eating the poor noble’s menu for 980 *zeni*.”

“I don’t like it when the money I took sounds like stolen money. This is a lawful right.”

Besides, the money we got from them is for “Eminence in Shadow” activities. If I waste my money here, it will hinder my future activities.

I’m the type of person who keeps their priorities straight.

Today I’ll also be taking the poor noble’s menu for 980 *zeni*. Believe me, this will lead me to success someday.

“It’s been a long time, lil’ bro.”

Just then, I heard a voice calling me from behind.

There’s only one person in the world who calls me “lil’ bro.”

“Nina-senpai, long time no see.”

Her red hair is as fine as silk today.

Her shirt is open daringly, and her inner lining is peeking out from her short skirt. Her fashion sense is full of style.

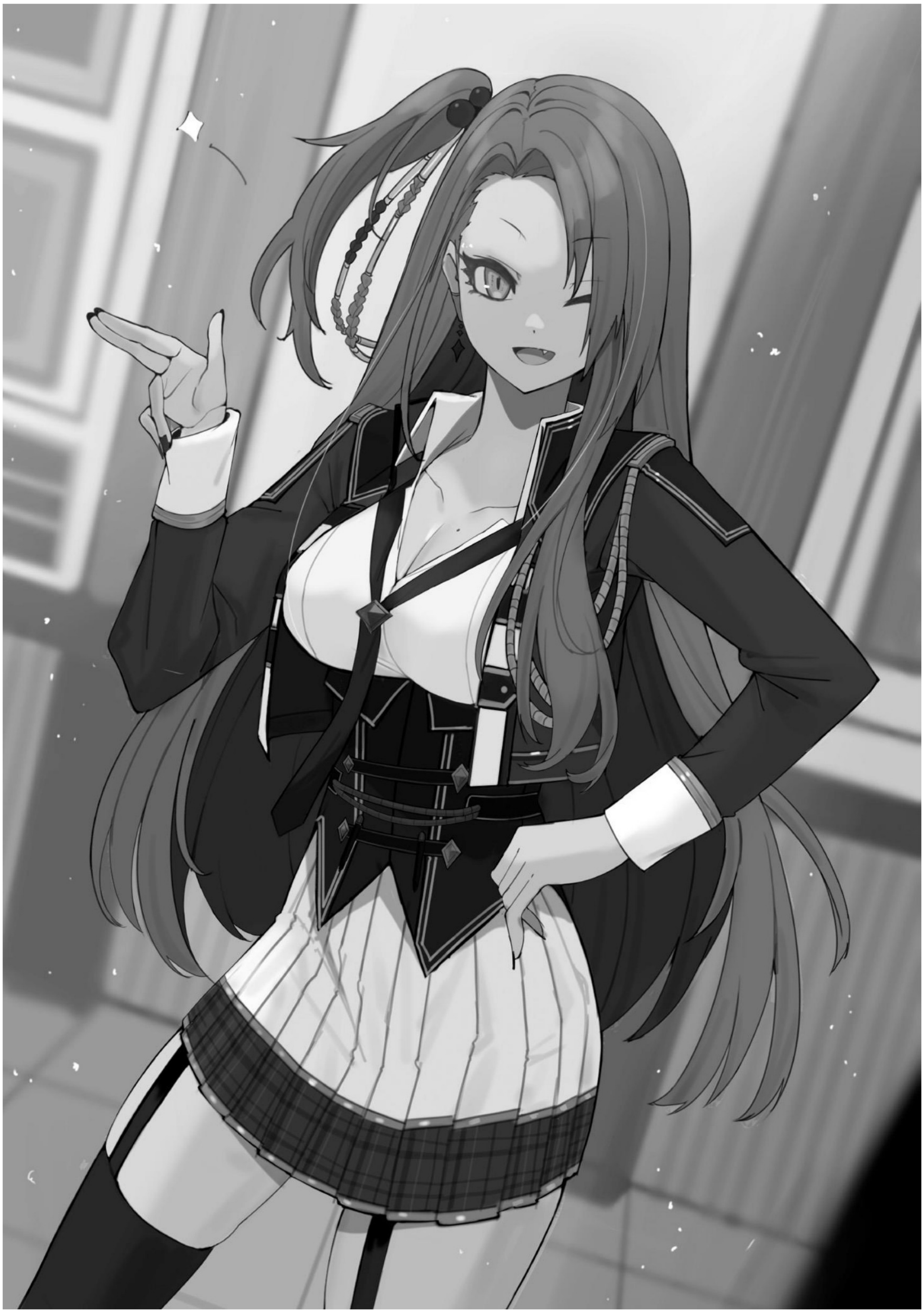
Nina is a third-year senior.

“Where were you during the winter break? Claire was looking for you. It’s hard for me to keep an eye on you.”

“Yeah, a lot of things happened.”

“Hmmm. A lot of things, huh.”

Nina-senpai approached me.



She has a small body. She is as tall as my chest.

“Do not break the line.”

I tried to stop her, but she easily dodged it.

“Are you going to eat a poor noble’s lunch for 980 *zeni* again, lil’ bro? You’re still being stingy.”

“It’s all for my big ambition for the future, not because I’m stingy.”

“Yeah yeah, whatever you say. But let me treat you something today. What do you want to eat?”

“The most expensive menu–”

“Okay. A rich noble’s luxurious lunch for 100 thousand *zeni*.”

Nina-senpai offered me the most expensive lunch of all.

She’s my sister’s friend and therefore always treats me well. She’s a great senior who does anything I ask.

I once impulsively wanted to read a banned book in the library and she immediately brought it to me. It’s still a mystery how she got the book, but I owe her a lot.

When I met Nina-senpai for the first time, I was glad she was my sister’s friend.

“T-Treat me too!”

“Y-Yeah, me too!”

Skel and Po said, although very nervous around Nina-senpai.

“But I already gave you a set of cards.”

“T-That’s true!”

“T-Thanks a lot for the cards, senpai!”

"Don't worry. That's my way of apologizing for the problem caused by Claire to you guys."

It seems she gave them cards for that problem.

Thanks to Nina-senpai's influence, we got a first-class table near the window.

"Sit down."

"Yes."

I sat next to Nina-senpai and started tasting my luxurious lunch, while Po and Skel were on the other side of the table eating their poor meals.

The luxurious lunch was on a different level. All prepared and served by the waiters.

"Claire seems to be missing."

The senior said while eating carpacho.

"It seems so–"

I'm eating too. I don't know what kind of fish this is, but it's delicious.

"A while ago Princess Alexia asked me about her, but I took that day for granted, so she's probably not okay. Don't you know anything, lil' bro?"

"I don't know anything either. But it seems she's still looking for clues."

"Yeah, it does seem like there's something wrong. And there are also other students missing. I'm starting to worry."

"It's true, it's worrying. And even more so with all the commotion and chaos last night."

"You mean what happened behind the boys dormitory? Yes, it was very frightening."

"Uh-huh~"

"Now I remember, I saw the Crimson Knights there. Now there are more members, but most of them seem like cowards."

"Ohh, you realized that."

"I have someone I can trust~"

Nina-senpai answered with a twinkle in her eye.

"Will you join the Knights when you graduate too, Nina-senpai?"

"I don't know. My grades aren't as good as Claire's."

"Eh? Is that true?"

"Does it surprise you? I'm quite famous for my poor grades."

"Ahh, I thought you were going to be the star student this year."

"Hahaha, that title will fall to Claire. She's developing quickly, so it's hard to keep up with her. And I, I'm just a slow girl."

Nina-senpai answered with a cheerful spoonful of soup in her mouth.

Actually, I always felt that Nina-senpai was stronger than my sister, but again, everyone has a reason to hide their real strength. Besides, Nina-senpai is a mysterious person.

"If I hear something about Claire, I'll let you know. You're worried about her, aren't you?"

"Worried? No, not at all... Uh, I mean, of course, I'm worried to death."

"You haven't changed at all... But yeah, it's true that worrying about Claire is pointless. If you need anything from me, don't hesitate to find me okay?"

Nina-senpai said with a sweet smile.

Meanwhile, Skel and Po remained silent as they ate their 980 *zeni* poor noble lunch.

* * *

“Hey, is it still far before we can leave?”

Claire breathed a sigh in one of the school’s classrooms.

Everything around was surrounded by white clouds, with not a soul besides her.

“It won’t be long now.”

“How long is ‘not long’? You’ve been saying that for a while now.”

“I told you, it won’t be long. I’m trying to expand the gap, but it takes time because your magic power is not enough to do it.”

“Oh, sorry because my magic power is weak. Although I don’t look like it, I am one of the people with the strongest magic power in this school.”

“The standards this school has are really bad.”

“Can you stop making me angry?”

“Sorry, I’m just speaking honestly without meaning to.”

“By the way, what do you mean by that gap?”

“A gap to return to your world.”

“My world? Where am I?”

“Oh sorry, I can’t tell you~”

Claire breathed another sigh. In the classroom, sitting cross-legged, there were many things she didn’t understand.

“Eh?”

Something touched her feet. When she looked closer, she realized that it was the arm of someone who was half-transparent, a human arm full of blood, gripping one of her feet.

“W-What is this!?”

Claire stood up and began shaking her foot to free herself from the grasp of the hand. After she released it, the arm fell to the floor, but it seemed to have produced a blood-drenched person.

It was a dark-skinned man, with sunken eyes and a large wound in his chest. He was clearly a dead person.

“Be careful. That is a ghost.”

“A ghost?”

“One of the heroes trapped in this eternity of this place in the past. Please free him.”

“Free him…? How?”

“Well, maybe by hitting him, for example?”

“Hmph!”

Claire summoned her magic power into her palm and punched the ghost.

When she did, the ghost shattered due to her strike.

“Disgusting.”

“If the ghosts are around, it means the seal is weakening... This is a little bad.”

“What seal?”

“Ah, I’m just talking to myself. Darn it, failed, I have to make sure you don’t hear me. Your magic power is weak, but you have good ears.”

“I can hear you.”

After that, Aurora became silent again.

Claire continued to fight the ghosts.

“If only I had my sword.”

Claire had left her sword on the other side.

So she just waited for Aurora to finish what she was doing while she defeated the ghosts from time to time.

The ghosts became more numerous and the white clouds increased.

“Aurora, how long does it need?”

“Almost there.”

“Really?”

“That’s right, but unfortunately... there’s a visitor coming.”

“Eh?” Claire felt a presence behind her and as she turned, a man in a black robe stood there.

His face was covered by a mask.

“Where did he come from...!?”

Claire stepped back a little and stood tall, but her stance was a bit scattered because she didn’t have her sword.

Meanwhile, the man, who indeed had a sword and seemed skilled in using it, was in front of Claire in the blink of an eye.

“So fast-!” Claire avoided the attack at the last moment and tried to take a step back.

However, the man in the black robe wouldn’t let her. He continued to attack.

“Guh.”

After being hit, Claire tried to stand up, her legs shaking.

Although she was hit hard, she was still able to fight.

The man didn’t seem to want to kill her, but he might want to capture her.

“It looks like you’re going to lose.”

Aurora spoke in her head.

“Quiet, the fight has just begun.”

“Really? I can see how this is going to end.”

“Noisy! If only I had my sword...!”

“I don’t think a sword would help you much in this situation.”

“Shut up!”

“He’s coming again.”

The man quickly ran and closed the distance between them.

“I’ll lend you my power.”

“—Eh?”

Everything happened very quickly.

The red tentacle had smashed the man in the black robe as he approached.

The red tentacle appeared under Claire’s feet, moving as if they were alive.

“W-What is this?”

“Blood.”

“Blood?!”

“If you fight hard, you can do it too. Because you are...”

“What am I?”

“....Nothing. Just concentrate, the fight isn’t over yet.”

Claire looked up. The man in the black masked robe was still holding on.

Blood was flowing from his cheek and his mask was broken.

“You’re from the knights...”

She had seen him when she was in the trial phase within the knights.

“Nice to meet you again, Claire-san.” The man said, waving his hand while smiling.

“Viscount Jean. Commander of division four of the third group of knights...”

“That’s a fake identity. I’m actually a named children, known as Jean ‘the dark smile’.”

What a terrible name, Claire thought, but only in her mind.

“I don’t know what a named children is, but it’s clear that I didn’t expect you to do something like this.”

“I also didn’t expect Claire-san to have power like this, interesting... Yet before, you didn’t have this much power.”

“Before?”

“Don’t worry, it’s all our business. Anyway, it seems necessary to go back and investigate you further.”

After saying that, he took out his stance with his sword.

Claire’s tentacles also entered battle mode, but for some reason, the tentacle’s power was not as great as before.

“Claire, this is bad.”

“Eh?”

“I’m starting to run out of magic power.”

“You...”

Claire clicked her tongue.

“It seems like my lucky day. I’ll be able to bring a big gift for my master.”

And then the person nicknamed the Dark Smile, as his name suggests, put a frown on his face.

That’s when something was heard.

It sounded like breaking glass, and the part of the world surrounded by clouds shattered.

“Eh!?”

From that place someone appeared.

It was a beastkin girl wearing jet-black clothing, with a beautiful tail and golden ears.

She approached Claire and countered the Dark Smile’s sword attack with an odd black mist.

“Guhhh!”

The impact was so strong that it made the Dark Smiler fly away.

Although the movement itself looked light, its strength for some reason was extraordinary...

The girl shrouded in black mist had a calm and cold gaze.

“Who are you...?”

“Zeta.”

She answered with a cold voice.

“Stay away Claire, I don’t know if she’s a friend or an enemy.”

Aurora’s voice echoed in her head.

Claire was surprised to hear her voice, which was very nervous.

So, she backed up a step, keeping her distance.

“May I assume that you saved me?”

“For now. I can’t let the cult catch you first.”

“Eh?”

The black mist sparkled for a moment and then Zeta was behind her.

“See you.”

Then she grabbed Claire by the neck of her shirt and threw her into the gap.

“Eh? What are you doingggggg!?”

Claire screamed, her scream coincided with herself being absorbed by the gap and disappearing.

With that, only Zeta and Jean, the Dark Smile, remained in that world.

“Tch... How dare you interfere with my mission.” Jean faced Zeta with his dark smile.

“Hm, nice to meet you.”

“You finally came, Shadow Garden.”

After saying that, he took out his fighting stance with his sword, while Zeta just looked at him with little interest.

“You seem pretty confident. Are you one of Shadow Garden’s generals?”

“You also figured it out?” Zeta’s answer was full of confidence.

She knew she was the most powerful one here.

“About what?”

“Its secret.”

“Meaning that power? I don’t know what—”

At that moment, Zeta’s magic power exploded.

His power was so strong and dense that it made the dark smile person fall to his knees.

“W-W-What kind of power is this? You’re hiding this magic power...?”

“Too bad. I could have let you live if you didn’t figure it out.”

“W-W-What are you talking about—”

“But since you know it, this is farewell.”

“W-What do you mean... Uhhhh?!”

Suddenly, black tears came out of the dark smile person’s eyes.

Then, from each of its holes, black fog came out, until finally its body exploded.

Zeta looked at the body and muttered.

“Hm, this new technique is not bad.”

Then she turned and spoke to the empty space, where nothing was visible.

“It’s over.”

In response to that voice, the space there began to change, and from there, a beautiful girl with light red hair, wearing black iron-tight clothes that clung to her body, stepped out. It was Victoria.

“Yes, Zeta-sama.”

She knelt to honor Zeta.

“I confirmed Aurora’s presence inside Claire-sama.”

“It seems we were right...”

"Hm, now everything fits."

"Do you think the cult knows about it?"

"Not yet."

"So what are we going to do about the plan?"

"We'll change it to Plan C."

"Claire-sama will be the key to the success of our plan. That's our ideal future."

"Master ordered me to look into the future."

"In that case, that is the will of our master..."

Victoria clasped her hands in front of her chest, as if praying.

"Also warn him that we will change his plan."

Zeta turned into black smoke and disappeared, while Victoria stood there, waving her hand while smiling.

* * *

What is heard inside the class is only the sound of answer sheets and pens.

I look around a bit and then to my exam paper.

"I don't understand shit."

As the end-of-year exams approach, the small quizzes in class are increasing.

Those who get bad grades are given homework, but it's too troublesome and too much.

It can be seen that the teachers are desperate to try to prevent those idiots from failing this year.

So far, I’m sticking to my role as a mob, almost unable to escape the average grades.

Of course, by cheating.

But the more I cheat, the easier I’ll get caught.

Isaac-kun is not in class today.

Isaac-kun is the model student in our class, and his seat is right next to mine, in a perfect position where I can always see his exam paper.

In other words, a student born with one purpose, to take the exam so I can cheat off his answers, and thanks to him, I can adjust my grades.

But it’s impossible for Isaac-kun not to come today!

If it’s like this, I’ll get a bad grade.

“Ugh...!”

The most important thing about cheating on exams is not the cheating itself, but who you’re cheating off.

There’s no point in cheating off the person who’s the dumbest.

I look to my right and see Skel nervously shifting his gaze from side to side.

I can’t use him.

I look to my left and see Po nervously looking under his desk.

I can’t use this person either.

The only remaining option is... the student in front of me, the daughter of a duke, Christina-san.

She’s one of the five best students in class, but there’s one drawback.

Because of her seat position, I can only see half of her paper.

I’ve already cheated all the answers I can see on her half paper.

But this might only be worth 40 points. I don’t have enough points to avoid failing.

Do I really have to erase my presence and move so I can cheat better?

But even if I erase my presence, it’s not like I make myself invisible. And because we’re in the middle of the day, in a large room, if I move, they’ll clearly see me even if I’ve erased my presence.

There are many eyes in the class, so they’ll definitely find out.

Another option is to move so quickly that no one can see that I’m moving.

This can be done by me.

If I do it with all my speed, it’s very easy.
But here comes another problem.

If I move with the speed where no one realizes that it’s me, they will still see the airflow created by my movement.

The exam paper might fly.

No, more accurately, I think Christina-san might fly away.

But I don’t have a choice.

I have no choice but to be careful not to create a gust of wind and move so fast that no one realizes it.

It’s unimaginable that a small quiz would force me to use my strongest technique...

I’m curious if I can really do it...

So far I’ve been practicing to move very fast, but I haven’t practiced to do it without emitting airflow.

But if they give me extra homework, I’m sure it will take 2 full days, very troublesome.

“...Let’s do it.”

Giving up here would be a disgrace for a mob.

I increase my magic power without anyone realizing it.

This is my true power, accept this.

And then, at that moment—

“You over there! What are you doing!?”

“—!?”

I was caught!?

I immediately reduce my magic power.

But the teacher apparently wasn’t looking at me.

He’s looking at—

“Skel Eton!! Are you cheating!?!”

“N-No-Of course not Sir, I swear sir I did not look at Christina-san’s answers!!”

Skel said trembling with a pale face.

“Oh, thank you for admitting it yourself. I’ve been watching you since the beginning of the exam. Get out of the class, you’ll get double the extra homework.”

“T-This can’t be...”

Skel’s face looked like a dead person as he walked out of the class.

At that moment, Christina-san looked at Skel like a walking pile of garbage.

W-Well, let’s continue with the plan.

Again I increased my magic power—and then.

“You over there! What are you doing!?”

Again!?

I raised my face but the teacher wasn’t looking at me.

He’s looking at the person sitting next to me.

“Po Tato!! What’s that under your desk!?”

“N-No-No sir, I swear sir!! I swear I don’t have any cheat sheets under my desk!!”

Po said it while sweating.

“Oh, it’s good that you admit it yourself. If you leave the class, I will give you three times the extra homework ”

“W-What, sir? Why not two...?”

Skel and Po stumbled out of the class, dragging their feet on the floor.

“The next person who tries to cheat will get four times the homework.”

The teacher said firmly.

These fools, Skel and Po, ruined my plan. Now it’s hard to cheat because the teachers are paying more attention to all the students.

But...

“...I don’t care about that threat.”

I increase my magic power.

Time starts to slow down.

It seems I can do it now.

This is my mob-fu technique for cheating on exams... Technique number 49!!

“Admire me—”

I concentrate fully, and at that moment, I heard something fall from the ceiling.

“...”

Everyone was suddenly silent, all the students froze.

For some reason, Claire Nee-san appeared and fell on the teacher, stealing everyone’s attention.

I didn’t expect my sister to fake her disappearance just to do this...

“What does she mean she won’t let them catch me first...!?”

My sister stood up, stepping on the teacher as she shouted on top of her head.

“Just tell me already! What special power do I have!?”

Then she reacted and started looking around the classroom.

“Claire Kagenou, this isn’t your class.”

The injured teacher said.

“Ah, umm, yeah... Ehehe.”

Then her face turned red, and I don’t know if she was laughing or shocked, it was a strange grin.

“E-Excuse me! Sorry!!”

Then she apologized by bowing, turning around and running out of the class.

She will probably be called by the teacher later.

She appeared from nowhere, shouting on top of her head and shouting that she has a special power... she probably still has the syndrome.

But what happened earlier was really helpful to me.

“...Thank you Nee-san for drawing a lot of attention.”

Thanks to that, I can smile because I have filled in all the blank spaces in my exam.

* * *

Claire walks out of the teacher’s room and takes a deep breath.

“This is a bad day.”

The twilight fills the hallway. She has spent at least one hour being lectured by one of her teachers without a break.

She can hear the voices of students in the distance, but there’s no one in the hallway, only her footsteps can be heard.

“Why did I have to fall in Cid’s class, now how am I going to face him tomorrow?”

With her cheeks flushing, she speaks in despair.

“It’s all your fault.”

“That’s mean. I didn’t do anything.”

“Then tell me about it. I already told that teacher about being in a strange room, the people attacking me and then I ran away and fell on him and he didn’t believe me at all. To make it worse, he almost called a doctor.”

“It’s better if you don’t know. If you comply, you won’t go back there.”

“Hey, I can’t just ignore everything that happened. I’m angry, you know?”

“….I can’t put you in danger.”

“I’m already in danger. If you don’t want to tell me, I’ll investigate it myself. I’ll never let it end like this.”

“There’s no use.”

“I’ll be the one to decide whether it’s useless or not, Witch of Calamity, Aurora-san.”

“Where did you hear that name...?”

“I already told you, I can investigate-” Claire didn’t finish her words.

In the hallway where she thought there was no one else but her, a silver-haired girl appeared.

“Sorry for interrupting you talking to yourself, Claire Kagenou-san. Can we talk for a bit?”

She was the daughter of the Midgar Kingdom, Alexia Midgar, watching Claire with full interest with her deep red eyes.

Claire’s expression tensed.

“I’m not talking to myself.”

“There’s no one else here.”

Alexia said that while pretending to look for someone.

It made Claire’s face stiffer than before.

“Princess Alexia, sorry but I’m not interested in talking to you at all.”

“Do you hate me? But this is the first time I meet Claire-san, isn’t it?”

“I don’t want to talk to the annoying princess who deceived Cid.”

Claire’s gaze changed into the gaze of a killer.

Or more precisely, her eyes widened in anger.

“What? There’s a reason for that! I don’t mean to deceive him.”

Alexia turned away slightly, feeling uncomfortable.

"Hey? Then why are you nervous? I can smell that you're lying."

"That's impolite! I won't do that! And what's with that attitude?! You're his elder sister, so I try to be respectful to you."

"You're a liar, aren't you?"

Claire replied right away, and this time Alexia said "tsk".

"You two are siblings, aren't you? You are each other's complementary in terms of rudeness."

"Eh? Do you think we're similar?"

"W-Well, yes. You're both impolite –"

"Ahh, that's it~ You're right, we're similar…Ehehe."

Claire smiled broadly.

"What's wrong with you?"

"You have a good eye for many things!"

"Umm…?"

Claire grabbed Alexia's shoulder and Alexia was surprised.

"So? What do you want to talk about?"

"Umm, it's..."

"I'm busy now, but what can I do. I'll listen for a bit."

"Thank you..."

"Oh yeah, what else do you think is similar between me and Cid?"

"Y-You both have black hair...?"

They both walked with Claire embracing Alexia’s shoulder along the corridor lit by the night light.

* * *

“Where am I?”

“A special room where only influential people can enter.”

Alexia turned on the lights to illuminate the luxurious room.

“Influential?”

“Seems like you forget that I’m someone from the royal family.”

“Ahh, that’s right.”

Is this annoying girl really forgot? Alexia thinks.

“Please, sit down.”

“Beautiful chairs and the embroidery is also so elegant. Too bad the money is wasted.”

“Hey, aren’t you being too picky?”

“I’m not.”

Alexia and Claire sat on the very soft chairs, facing each other.

They were alone in a large room.

Alexia looked back at Claire.

She was a beautiful woman with red eyes, black hair, good at studying and sword skills.

Even, it was said that her skills had grown so much that she unofficially decided to join the Crimson order.

She was not like her younger brother except for her rude behavior.

“Why so serious?”

“Because I want to talk about something very serious.”

“I know. But I won’t give Cid to you.”

“I-I don’t want him!”

Alexia raised her voice and then coughed to change the subject of conversation.

“I want to talk about what happened earlier today, when you fell on the teacher.”

“What? You also want to preach to me?”

“I just want to know what happened.”

“I made a big magic leap from outside the classroom and attacked the teacher. Stress seems to have made me crazy. I don’t understand at all, but that’s what happened. I’m contemplating my actions.”

Claire spoke in a monotone voice as if she had memorized it.

“I don’t want that unimportant explanation.”

“I will write a letter of apology like I did before.”

“But the reality is different, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I know for sure you have been investigating about the demon Diabolos.”

Accompanied by those words, Alexia dropped the notes she found in Claire’s room on her room’s table.

“Hey, that’s mine...!”

“You’re investigating all this not just out of curiosity, right?”

“...What do you want to know?”

Claire became serious this time.

“Everything. I want to know everything that happens in this school.”

“...Will you not make fun of me?”

“I swear.”

“Really?”

“Serious.”

Claire was quiet and then shifted her gaze.
She looked into the emptiness, as if she was talking to someone who was actually not there.

After a few moments, she shook her head.

“Forgive me, Aurora.”

“Eh?”

Alexia tilted her head in confusion at the nonsensical words.

But Claire was not talking to Alexia. She was only staring at the ceiling.

“I am at my limit. I don’t know anything, and I’m worried...”

Claire said it with a slight quiver in her voice.

“Sorry, it’s nothing.”

She said it with a little smile.

“...Are you okay?”

“I am not okay at all... That’s why I’m going to tell everything. It sounds silly, but you’re free to believe it or not.”

“I will believe you.”

Claire looked into Alexia’s eyes, she didn’t seem to be lying.

“If that’s the case, I’ll start by introducing you to her.”

“...Who?”

“She is a spirit named Aurora, she is also known as the ‘witch of calamity .’ Say hello to Aurora.”

No one was in the place Claire pointed to.
No matter how hard Alexia blinked or rubbed her eyes, she couldn’t see anything.

“She is the person I met when—”

Seeing Claire start to speak as if there was someone there, Alexia regretted a little that she said she believed her

* * *

“And that’s all that happened.”

As Claire finished telling all that had happened to her, it was already dark outside.

Alexia sipped her coffee and breathed out as the fire in the fireplace crackled.

“....I more or less understand everything.”

“Do you believe me?”

“Yes. Actually, it all sounds crazy, but it can’t be denied that everything is connected now.”

“Connected?”

“Yes. Everything is connected, the Shadow Garden, the Diabolos Cult, what happened at the school, everything. However, I find it hard to believe in the spirit thing.”

“I-I already told you Aurora is real! She’s sitting over there laughing right now.”

Alexia looked towards the sofa where no one was.

“Well, let’s leave the spirit matter aside...”

“I already told you she’s there!”

“I recognize the name. The witch of calamity, Aurora. I think one of the leaders of the cult mentioned the name.”

“Is the Diabolos Cult related to her?”

“I’m not sure. I tried doing research, but I didn’t find much information about her. The only thing remaining in history is that she was a woman who caused a major disaster in the world.”

“Aurora, what kind of disaster did you cause?”

Claire asked the spirit next to her.

It appears they are having a conversation.

“Oh, I see. I understand. Aurora says she destroyed a race called orcs. She says she was disgusted by them.”

“...I don’t think that’s the reason.”

“Not that... ? Hmm, hmm, I see. Aurora says she was the one who scratched the sacred shield of Aegis. She says she didn’t know it was a famous shield.”

“That’s not it at all! Besides the sacred shield of Aegis has been lost and has not been found yet...”

“That’s right, that’s not the reason either. So...”

"Let's leave the spirit topic for another day. It's best if we continue what's important to us."

"But there are still many heroic stories about Aurora."

"I already told you! Save it for another day! Let's get back to the main topic!"

Alexia coughed and changed the subject.

"First, we need to uncover the mystery of what happened at the school."

"That's true."

Claire was serious again.

"And about the room where you were locked up, I also experienced something like that before, in the holy land."

Alexia explained everything she had experienced in the holy place.

"....It's true, it sounds like the room I was in."

"In other words, something similar to what happened in the holy land is happening at this school. And the person who fought with you, the one called the dark smile or whatever, he's definitely a member of the cult."

"He's Viscount Jean from the third division of knights."

"I have a hunch, but someone from the Diabolos Cult is infiltrating the Knights. I can't trust the Knights right now."

"What about Iris-sama? She is the commander of the crimson knights, can't she help us?"

"My sister... she's busy right now. Anyway, there's no doubt that the cult kidnapped the students and is planning to do something with them."

"Plan what?"

"A phenomenon very similar to the Holy Land has occurred at Midgar Academy. In other words, it's not strange that the demon Diabolos was sealed away, just like in the Holy Land."

"If you think about it, there's a rumor that Diabolos's right arm is sealed at Midgar Academy... That's just a rumor, right?"

Alexia shook her head.

"I can't confirm that."

"Eh? You're joking?"

"I don't know for sure... But there's a forbidden book in the library that records the school's history. If Diabolos's right arm is sealed at Midgar Academy, it must be written there."

"And isn't that book obtainable through the influence of the royal family?"

"It might be, but it would take time."

"So what are we going to do?"

"Well, there's nothing to be done except steal it."

Alexia put a smile on her face.

"If we get caught, we'll be in big trouble."

"It's okay as long as we don't get caught. We can't trust the knights, and we can't trust the teachers. In other words, we have no choice but to handle this ourselves."

"But if I get caught, I'll lose my job for the rest of my life."

"I'll hire you. I'm used to throwing gold coins."

"For what are you throwing them?"

"It's important to clarify who's on top and who's on bottom."

"Hmmm."

"Anyway, we have to act now. Even as we speak, the cult is acting from the shadows and Shadow Garden is probably also planning something. We have to do something before there are more casualties."

After hearing Alexia's words, Claire thought for a moment and then said,

"What if we surrender everything to Shadow Garden?"

"...There's still a lot I don't know about them. I don't even know why they're fighting the cult, but as long as I don't know anything, I can't fully trust them."

"Is that so? Well, I said that because they saved me that time in the lawless city."

"Still... they're too dangerous. With the power they have, we'll lose if they decide to fight the kingdom. That's why I understand my sister's concern."

"That's true... But you might understand. Besides, Shadow defeated Elizabeth, the Blood Queen, alone. If the Blood Queen's power is what the legend says, Shadow is beyond normal."

"I want to believe he's weak... If the legend is true, the Midgar Kingdom will continue to monitor Shadow's condition from here on."

"I mean, if we're reckless, they could be a far greater threat than the cult."

"Exactly. Also within Shadow Garden there are what are called the Seven Shadows. Each of them has great power, equal or even greater than my sister... meaning the only power isn't Shadow's but the entire organization."

"You remind me of a beastkin named Zeta... I was surprised to see Aurora so nervous when she saw her. Aurora said she didn't know if she was a friend or foe."

"I really hope they're on our side, but at least for now... I still can't trust them, they're too dangerous."

Alexia pressed her lips tightly together.

"It's true... that's why we have to act alone. Alright Alexia, I'll help you."

"Thank you, Claire."

Claire tightly clenched her hand with the carved magic seal.

“Waiting won’t get us anywhere. I need to know about Aurora, the magic circle, and Shadow... Thank you, Alexia.”

“Eh?”

Alexia was surprised by Claire’s words.

“Thank you for listening to my story. I can’t bear being alone in all this, but when you listened to me and said you believe in me, I feel a little better.”

“...Yeah.”

“That’s why I understand Alexia’s feelings. Being lonely when you’re alone.”

“...It’s not like I’m actually lonely.”

Alexia’s voice shook for a moment.

She just didn’t want to see her sister wield her sword like she was possessed.

Rose left Alexia and went away alone.

And Natsume she never trusted so she didn’t count.

“Let’s do this together.”

Claire extended her hand and reflexively Alexia shook it. She could feel the warmth welcoming her.

“Thank you, Claire.”

“Likewise. Besides, it’ll give me a reason to keep an eye on you.”

Claire nodded and suddenly tightened her grip on Alexia’s hand.

“Eh?”

“It wouldn’t hurt to help you with this if it means keeping an evil fly away from her.”

“I-It hurts, Claire.”

“Oh, sorry Alexia. I’m happy to work with you.”

“Y-Yeah, gladly, Claire.”

Alexia replied, and they both smiled.

Meanwhile, the spirits there looked at them thinking how similar they were.

* * *

Claire and Alexia stood in front of the door of the room in the girls' dormitory.

"Claire, are you sure?"

Alexia said hesitantly.

"I'm serious. I'll ask Nina so you can believe me. Cid once said he wanted to read a forbidden book to Nina, and the next day Nina brought him the book!"

"Is that true? That's even more suspicious."

"Don't worry. Cid wouldn't dare lie to me."

"I don't believe it. That man is a liar and has ambitions."

"Hey, don't mock Cid."

"I'm just saying the truth."

Alexia said that and then knocked on the door.

"I'm coming."

Nina answered casually and then opened the door.

"Oh, Claire. Thank goodness, I was worried about you."

It was a short girl with grape red hair.

"Sorry to make you worry, Nina."

"As long as you're safe, it's okay. Just let me know the next time you'll disappear."

"I will, if I can."

"Also, it's strange to see you two together. Nice to meet you, Princess Alexia." Nina said while looking at Alexia.

"Hi, nice to meet you too Nina-san."
"Just call me Nina. Since when are you two friends?"

"We're not friends."

"If you don't mind, I can say we're enemies."

Alexia and Claire gave almost the same answer.

"Oh, whatever. So, do you want to come in first? It looks like you came to talk to me about something."

She invited both of them into her room.

Nina sat on the bed, and both of them sat on the luxurious sofa.

"Before we get into the topic, can I ask you a question?"

Alexia said, looking unsure where to look.

"Of course, ask away."

"Why are you only wearing underwear?"

Actually, Nina was wearing very sexy underwear.

Although small in stature, her figure was amazing, with enticing parts that could steal attention even from the girls.

"Because it's more comfortable."

"Do you always wear this?"

"Actually, yes. It's just that, the lingerie they sell at Mitsugoshi is amazing, the best there is."

Nina said with a smile as she displayed her underwear that covered her curves.

"I don't believe it... Oh yeah, tell me the model number later."

"Of course. If you want, I can also recommend some."

"Show that too."

Alexia replied with a very serious expression.

"If you never show it to anyone, what's the point of trying?"

Claire said while laughing.

"Noisy."

And Alexia looked at her with anger.

"Let's quickly get to the main topic."

"That's right. It's almost time for me to sleep, so please hurry. Staying up late is the worst enemy of my beautiful skin."

"Good. Good. What we want to ask you is about the forbidden book. How did you get it?"

"Forbidden book? I don't know what you're talking about."

"You don't have to lie, Cid said so himself. He said you gave him the forbidden book."

"Your brother? No way, I would never do that."

"I told you, you don't have to lie."

"I'm not lying. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Is that true?"

"Honestly. Just imagine, how could I sneak into those warehouses?"

"See? I told you Pochi was lying to you."

Alexia said mockingly.

“Sh-Shut up! Nina, are you serious, are you hiding something from me?!”

“C-Calm down Claire, I’m telling the truth!”

Claire starts shaking Nina by the shoulders so hard that her bra clip comes off.

“Uhhhh~!”

As Claire, who was all red, bit her lip hard.

“Stupid Cid!! You lied to me again! This time I really won’t forgive you!”

“Finally, you admit he’s lying.”

“Shut up, shut up, enough! I want to go home!”

“To your real home?”

“To my room!”

“W-Wait, hey! We haven’t planned anything for tomorrow…”

Claire, who was red with anger, left the room while Alexia chased after her.

“Ah, sorry for bothering you~”

“I don’t understand anything, but don’t push yourself.”

After Nina said that, Alexia closed the door with a forced smile.

The room was truly quiet, and that was when Nina stood up and walked to the window.

“Okay.”

The bra that had come off fell to the floor and her figure was reflected in the window.

There, on her left breast, she had a scar.

“...It’s time to move.”

She caressed the wound with one of her slender fingers.

And that gaze, that icy gaze, stared deep into the darkness.

* * *

I like walking at night.

I love how the moonlight illuminates the world and takes away all my worries.

Now I’m not worried anymore, but in my past life, I often vacillated between dream and reality to become a “Eminence in Shadow”.

I used to dispel those doubts with practice, but then I realized walking at night, lit by the moon, was a good way to recover myself.

Just by standing in this desolate world and gazing at the moon, I can feel like a shadowy lord figure.

The occasional motorcycle gang would make a scene, but at those times I would grab a crowbar and use it in the name of justice.

Anyway, it’s exactly like I said, ever since I entered school, I almost always go out like this to take a walk at night.

My favorite part is climbing to the top of the school building and observing everything from above.

“Kukuku…”

And laughing in this suspicious way will make me look even cooler.

The moon today is more beautiful than usual.

I took out the red gem that I had cleaned because of Delta’s saliva, and then held it up to the moon.

It is crimson, fantastic and very beautiful.

“It seems that there is magic power in it. I don’t know how much money I’ll get from this thing.”

Well, Delta did a good job this time around.

I’m looking forward to auctioning it at Mitsugoshi.

If I earn a lot of money, I guess I’ll be able to buy the full set of shadow lords, already on my cherished item list.

For example, the black lion’s mane, the dark vase, and also….

“…Hm?”

I suddenly looked to the side, and there on the roof of the school, right beside me, stood an old man in a black robe.

What on earth was he doing here? Very weird…

Hmm? Wait, isn’t that the robe he’s wearing made of black spider silk?! Yes it is.

It was a garment made from the finest cloth of all.

“…What an old man’s good taste.”

I admire the old man’s style.

His hair fell down to his waist.

His face was deep, with a gaze as sharp as an eagle’s, which made him look that much cooler.

I tried to hear what he was muttering.

“This plan is behind schedule…”

Ah, he’s a thief.

With that plan and being in this place, my mind is always on it.

I guess he came because of the rare items this school is famous for.

In other words, he is a stylish thief.

“I already knew that they would interfere. But it’s okay…. I just have to eliminate them.”

He said all that without knowing that I was watching him.

But I like it, the words have style.

Suddenly, the stylish thief turned around
and our gazes met.

I erased my presence, but not my body, so obviously, he saw me.

“Eh!? How long have you been there!?”

“Ah, take it easy. I was just taking a walk.”

I don’t want to get in the way, so I try not to be mean.

“You don’t look like a knight, who are you?”

“An ordinary student.”

“So a student…from the looks of it, it does. Who would have thought that on my first day, I would be caught by a normal student.”

“I think so. See you later.”

“Wait. Since you have seen me, I must kill you.”

“Ah, I’m not trying to get in your way. I don’t care for thieves like you entering Midgar Academy.”

I tried to tell him that, but the stylish thief didn’t listen to me.

“You’re out of luck, boy.”

“Whoops.”

I dodged the two scythes aimed at my neck by moving sideways.

It’s fast enough, and seems strong enough for a thief.

Indeed, a stylish thief must be this strong.

“What!? How could you possibly avoid it!?”

The thief was careful and kept his distance.

“Who are you…? You don’t look like a normal student.”

The stylish thief asked in a low voice.

“I didn’t really mean to bother you.”

“You must be from the knight special forces. You were the first to dodge one of my attacks.”

“I’m just an ordinary student.”

“Don’t talk nonsense. You must be the one who finished off the dark smile. No wonder my lord asked me, the black spider, to come to you.”

“Yes, I think you have the wrong person.”

“But too bad, you’re not having any luck this time.”

“Not lucky?”

“I… am stronger than the dark smile.”

The thief in style this time lunged to chop off my arm.

Track.

But when the scythe hit my arm, there was a loud crash and sparks flew.

“W-why can’t I cut it?”

I changed my clothes.

I made the slime covering my clothes move across my arms to make claws.

“Those black clothes… you are from the Shadow Garden…”

The stylish thief quickly distanced himself.

But, no matter how far he traveled, the result was the same.

“Fast-!”

I shortened the distance between us and dug my claw into his heart.

“I-Impossible… T-This power…”

“Hmm?”

He clasped the claws in my hand as he furrowed his brows.

“No way… here… impersonating a student… I’m sorry… Fen… rir… sama…”

After saying that, the man spat out a large amount of blood.

“Good grief. I really don’t want to kill him.”

I grabbed his cloak which was made of black spider silk so it wouldn’t be stained by his blood and then I threw him from the building.

“Ah, damn it.”

I looked down but it was too late, the stylish thief was already dead when he fell.

I mean, it would have been better if he had fallen to the ground dead, but damn he landed right on top of the school statue’s blade.

And well, now it looks as if someone has executed him.

What should I do with the corpse now?

“….Well, whatever.”

There was blood splattered everywhere, and cleaning it up was a real pain.

I’ll leave it there as a surprise gift for the students living normal and peaceful lives.

“Hmm?”

Then I noticed how a white mist enveloped everything around him.

This is weird. Some time ago there wasn’t even a trace of fog.

“Is that fog…?”

But before I could get a good look at it, the white mist disappeared without a trace.

“Eh? Is it just my imagination…?”

It’s not just my imagination, I’m sure I saw the white mist just now.

“….Well, whatever.”

My life won’t change just by seeing a trail of white mist, and if I really want to see mist, I can go to the mountain and see it any time.

Besides, there are more important things I must do now; Went to my room, hung this cloak made of black spider silk on the wall and finally got a good night’s sleep.

* * *

This place is shrouded by deep white mist, and only four round lights illuminate it.

“Its compatibility level is very low... is it because it’s in a bad condition? But there’s not much we can do. Lately, it’s been very difficult to find people who are possessed.”

In front of the lights, there stands a skinny man.

The man sighs as he writes a letter on the file in his hand.

“Has there been any news from the sample retrieval team?”

Closer, in the middle of the red lights, there’s something else.

One person.

Not one, but four. The four people float in the middle of the red light, connected by what looks like thin tubes.

The tubes absorb something from them, as if they were living creatures, making their faces have no life.

“There’s no time left now... if it keeps going like this we will...”

The man spins around the red lights.

At that moment, he hears footsteps coming from the mist.

“How are you, ‘Willow’?”

The person who said that stands in the middle of the mist.

And then, the man called ‘Willow’ quickly turns around and straightens his body.

“We’ve captured four students with compatible magic. We keep losing their magic power, so we believe that the seal will break sooner or later-”

“Sooner or later? Are the four people the same from before?”

“Umm, someone from the Shadow Garden blocked our way...”

“Gulp” Willow swallowed his saliva nervously.

“I’ve heard about it.”

“Yes, and, it seems that the one blocking our way is the generals from the Shadow Garden...”

“Ohh... the famous Seven Shadows?”

The man with the unseen face says with interest.

“Maybe. If it’s true, it’s one of the Seven Shadows we don’t know.”

“In this case, it should be Zeta.”

“Yes, I heard she’s very good at hiding and running...”

“I’ve never heard a report about her fighting, that’s why I think she’s not a fighter type.”

“That’s right, and also, because she may have been the one who erased the Dark Smile, she’s certainly much stronger than the Named Child.”

“Ohh, interesting. And who did you call as the Dark Smile’s replacement?”

“I want to be careful, so this time I called one of the strongest Named Children we have, the Black Spider. I think with him our plan this time will-”

“Ah, speaking of the Black Spider, he just died.”

“... Eh?”

“He was stabbed in front of the school.”

“Um... That...”

“It’s true.”

“R-Really? Ah, I’m sorry, it’s not that I doubt you. I imagine it was Zeta who eliminated him as well.”

“Who knows. I don’t know who did it, but Shadow Garden is definitely working quickly. I’m envious. I wish I had subordinates like that too.”

“Haha...”

“What are you going to do about the delay in the plan?”

“I’ll ask for more support from headquarters.”

“Our assets have decreased a lot due to the recent loss of trust. I imagine they’ll send the Second and Third Children to you, but I want to know how you’re going to handle it with weak subordinates like them,”

“U-Umm...”

“Shadow Garden already knows about this wreckage. I think it won’t be too long before they can break through the defense system.”

“We’ve already found the perfect subject. Claire Kagenou and Alexia Midgar, with your permission. If we get both of them, we should be able to complete the plan immediately.”

“Alexia Midgar, huh...”

“Is it not possible?”

“... No, it’s okay. Besides, Zenon has already captured her once, I think it’s not wrong to try again. Also, our Fenrir faction has been controlling the Midgar Kingdom for a long time now.”

“In that case, I will give the order to my subordinates.”

“No, it’s going to be you, Willow.”

“Eh?”

“I’m sure you’ve missed the criminal scene. We’ve also gone to great lengths to prepare a place and role for you at the school, so you should take advantage of it.”

“Uh, but I don’t feel I have the power to…”

Not long after he said that, a gust of wind blew across Willow’s neck, leaving a small wound.

“If you use your position, I’m sure you can capture them.”

"...Okay."

"I don't have much free time now because I'm investigating the ruins. Don't disappoint me."

"Okay."

Willow left the place as quickly as he could.

"...Good."

And there, in the midst of the fog, something was being projected.

The image of two girls. One was a golden-haired beastkin and the other was a human with light red hair.

Both of them were from Shadow Garden.

"Zeta, and the other one I think is the 'Saint'... So Shadow Garden has brought her in. I want to know how she reacts if she finds out about the country."

In the projection, Zeta and Victoria were walking in the fog.

And behind them, there was another girl.

She was dressed differently from the members of Shadow Garden and also wore a cloak that covered her face.

"The defense system has been breached up to level three. All depends on the result of Willow…"

After muttering that, the man disappeared.

But the projection still ran in the empty room, so no one realized that the golden-eyed girl was looking right at the projection.

I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
and hoped to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood,
"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence in Shadow

I can't remember the moment anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow"
ever since I could remember.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene,
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,

The Eminence in Shadow
Volume Five
Chapter Two

On a Shocking Morning, the School Murder Case!

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On a shocking Morning, the School Murder Case!

Waking up is exhilarating.

Why is that? Because of the free black robe of black spider silk that I got last night. I admired the robe shining in the morning sun and was so happy that I left for school a step earlier than usual.

It's been a long time since I went to school alone.

Skel and Po were always on the verge of being late.

Sometimes it felt good to go to school early.

The faces of the students on the street were fresh, and it was nice to walk through the school gates and see them all. The morning sun made the body refreshed…

“…This is bad.”

“Why are you here, Pochi?”

“Why is Alexia here?”

I walked through the school gate and there was Alexia.

“You should feel happy to see me in the morning.”

“Wow~ I'm really happy.”

“You should be.”

“See you later.”

“Wait, don't run away.”

I started walking away, and Alexia soon followed.

“Why are you following me?”

“Because you're running away, that's why I'm chasing you.”

“You want to prey on me, don't you?”

“You should feel proud to be hanging out at school with me.”

“…”

“Why are you silent?”

“…Today you're really happy, eh?”

“Not as happy as you are.”

As we walked, talking about these things, there was some sort of crowd in front of the school.

I could hear the hubbub of the students.

“H-He's dead…”

“Who would do this…?”

“Hey, stay away! The Knights are coming. So before that…”

Alexia and I looked at each other.

“There's a corpse!”

“Let's go.”

This was my first shocking incident after so long in an unchanging school life.

It was only natural that my heart was racing with anticipation.

I broke through the crowd, my eyes shining, wondering what kind of corpse I would find.

And then… I was surprised.

“Ah, it's this one.”

Looking back, I dropped it from the roof last night and left it there.

I had forgotten about that time.

“How horrible… Stabbing him on a statue with a sword like that. Was he executed?”

“It looks like an accident.”

“No, that's not possible. There must always be a reason to kill someone in such an unusual way.”

“Is that so?”

Alexia looked at the corpse with a serious face.

“From his appearance, it doesn't seem like he's someone from the academy.”

“I think he's a thief.”

“Doesn't look like someone from the Order either. It could be an intruder…”

“I think he's a thief.”

“Could be a cult member, or…”

“I told you he was a thief.”

“You're getting chatty, there's no way he's just a thief.”

“Bye.”

In that case, whatever.

The surrounding students also seemed excited, just as I had planned.

“I'm scared… Don't tell me it's all that organization's doing.”

“The missing students haven't been found yet, have they?”

“There was also a case of magic overflow yesterday. It seems like there's a lot more to this case than meets the eye.”

I'm happy, really happy.

That's right, the dogs and cats were in a frenzy, and a thief fell to his death. If the case becomes this big, I'm very satisfied as the person behind it.

What should I do? Maybe I can go into Shadow mode and continue to enliven the atmosphere.

“Why are you smiling to yourself from earlier?”

“Hm? Ah, it's nothing.”

Alexia, with her red eyes, looked at me curiously.

“Do you two have a minute?”

Then a boy spoke to us.

A handsome guy with dark green hair… Isaac-kun.

“Wow, Isaac-kun. How could you skip class yesterday?”

“Um, you're Cid-kun, right? I had some business yesterday. What was it?”

“There was a small quiz.”

“There was a small quiz, what's the connection?”

“No, nothing.”

“Then that's fine. Besides, school is closed today.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“This is a terrible incident. The school management and the Knight Order will investigate, so I've been instructed to leave this place. Suspicious people may be lurking in this area, so be careful. Never leave the dormitory.”

“Hm. Hm”

“It's dangerous, so be careful. Pochi.”

“Okay.”

At that moment, something stuck to my neck with a clank.

Is this a necklace?

“I finally caught you!”

When I turned around, there she was, my sister with a big smile on her face.

“H-Hi, long time no see, nee-san.”

“It's been a long time. I think the last time I saw you was before winter break.”

“T-That's right.”

I was caught off guard.

I've been trying not to meet her because she's so troublesome.

“H-Hey, Claire. That necklace…”

“Is there something wrong with this necklace?”

“So it's Claire's necklace?”

“Yes, it is. It was supposed to be in my room, but somehow the Order kept it. It's very difficult to get it back.”

“S-So. What are you going to do with it?”

“Isn't it obvious?”

She pulled the chain and laughed.

“Ah, um. right… I see. Dogs need collars.”

“That's right, they need collars.”

“I'm not a dog.”

“What are you talking about, Pochi?”

“He's Cid, you're making fun of him again. His name is not Pochi but Cid.”

She pulled me up and I was dragged through the crowd.

When did those two become friends?

* * *

“How dare you break your promise.”

“Ah, ahahah”

I was taken to my sister's room and laid down.

“And besides that, you lied.”

“Lied? What lie?”

“Are you seriously asking?”

I was choked.

Oh damn, I dug my own grave.

I didn't know which one because I had lied to my sister many times.

“I-It hurts…”

But it's a lie.

“You're not lying to me, right?”

“No, I'm not.”

Yeah, it's a lie.

“Really?”

“Yes, truly, truly.”

She looked into my eyes, so close to my face that our noses touched.

“…That's a good eyes, meaning your heart is clean. I guess you're not lying now.”

“If you lie to me, I'll know right away, so why did you lie to me before?”

My sister is blind.

“I know. You mean that lie, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, the lie about Nina.”

"Lie about Nina-senpai?"

Eh?

Am I lying about Nina-senpai?

“Don't say you forgot.”

“I didn't forget anything. About Nina-senpai, right? That's a complicated situation so it can't be explained in one word…”

“Haah~ you're just making things up to show your good side, aren't you?”

“Yeah, more or less.”

“I know everything you're thinking.”

“Okay, I'm sorry.”

“Alright, I forgive you. This one time.”

Then the conversation ends.

But she's staring at me.

“Nee-san, you're heavy. It's time to step aside…Ugh!”

My n-neck…

“Cid, what did you just say?”

“I said, you're slim. Have a beautiful charm and style!”

“Exactly, that's me.”

“Yeah, that's you.”

“Ufufu. Cid will always be Cid, no matter how old he is. I want you to stay like that. I just…”

My sister created a serious atmosphere.

“Nee-san?”

“As long as Cid stays like that, I'm ready to face strong enemies.”

“Umm…”

Is her illness relapsing?

“Listen, Cid. A strong evil organization is at the academy.”

“Ah, its this pattern”

“I can't give you the details for your own safety… There's no use looking at me like that.”

“Oh, I see.”

“I'll solve the mystery at the academy. It's a dangerous mission… But I'm sure I can do it for Cid.”

“Good luck.”

“Be careful, Cid. You're my little brother and you can become a target. But I'll do my best to defeat the bad guys…”

“Take them down!”

“Sorry for worrying you. Unfortunately, I can't tell you something important. But I'm doing this to protect you, and I know it's selfish, but I want you to understand.”

“I understand!”

“Then… if I don't come back… that means I've… ”

She's in the middle of her speech while tears streaming down her face, then she suddenly looked to an empty space.

“Hey, Aurora, can you stay quiet during this touching moment? Eh? What? Stop it because it's embarrassing? What's embarrassing…”

She looked at me with a straight face and our eyes met.

“Nee-san…”

“Ah, i-it's, n-not-nothing. I was just talking to myself!”

“Nee-san, I understand.”

“Cid… you understand? There is a long reason for this.”

“Of course.”

This is an eighth-grader syndrome.

“Thank you, Cid. You're always good to me. If… If I die…”

Tears flowed down my sister's face.

“You'll be fine, Nee-san. You're not going to die.”

“Cid…!! I'm sure, I'm sure I'll come back!”

“Yes, right.”

I was hugged so tightly that my spine broke.

When will this charade end?

* * *

The long-awaited night has arrived.

I sneak out of the dormitory and stand on the roof of the school as usual.

The school is on alert, and the entrance and exit of the dormitory is closely monitored. The students look uneasy.

I never thought that last night's thief would attract this much attention. This unusual feeling is exciting.

In my previous life, I was the type of person who was excited every time a storm hit.

Even though it's midday, there's a strong wind and rain in the dimly lit classroom—it's the best.

It feels like something is going to happen. Even though nothing does.

My purpose is to take advantage of this and make something happen.

The students are bored with the usual school life and hope for something disruptive.

“What should I do…?”

Four students missing from the academy, then, a stray dog and cat fighting, a thief falling from the roof and dying… Is there a breakthrough event that can bring everything together?

“A big magic circle, or a mantra or… That doesn't make sense. Hmm?”

As I was thinking about it, before I realized it, the area was shrouded in white mist.

“Eh? Isn't this the weather that wasn't normal yesterday?”

Then my vision completely changed to white and I was in an endless white room.

“Hmm? What was that?”

It's like a fantasy.

Suddenly I was taken to another room. This has happened before, I'm sure in a holy land…

“Who are you?”

There's a girl in the white room.

She is a little younger than me and wearing a clean white dress. Beautiful violet-colored eyes.

“Hey, it's been a long time.”

I recognize her briefly, although our ages are different. She's Violet-san.

“Who are you? A new researcher?”

“Don't tell me you don't remember?”

“I-I don't know.”

“If you think about it, you did say something about memory.”

“Don't come any closer…”

The young Violet-san seems wary.

“You don't have to be afraid. I'm not on the side of justice, but I'm not a completely bad person either.”

“W-Why are you here…?”

“I don't know, I just suddenly came here. How about you?”

“I, I… Aaaaaaah!”

She holds her head and starts to worry.

“Are you okay?”

“Why… me…. Aaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

She scratches and screams.

She looks to be in great pain.

“Don't force yourself to remember. I'm also forgetful. To focus on something important, I quickly forget everything that's not important and decrease my brain's memory.”

“I-I don't want… Stop, please stop… Nooooo!”

With a scream, incredible magical power is released.

“Whoa, I told you, you don't have to remember it.”

I let Violet-san's magical power pass me by.

I try to approach her.

“Stay away from meeeeeeee!”

“What's with this magic?”

It surprised me.

Adult Violet-san is powerful, but this one exceeded her.

But the straightforward magic is easy to avoid.

I shifted my magical flow as I walked and caught it.

“No, no, no, nooooo!”

“Okay, okay.”

I hugged Violet-san and let the magic flow through her.

It's like calming a demon possession. If you keep your whole body in close proximity, it will be more efficient.

“Let go… Let me go…”

“You can forget anything you don't want to remember.”

As I continued to channel my magical energy, her rage gradually subsided.

Her strength weakened and the pressure dissipated.

“Is…Is there something you can't forget?”
She said in a small voice.

“I don't know. If I try not to remember it, maybe someday I'll forget it.”

“…I can't.”

“That's how it is. Are you calm now?”

“U…Uhm.”

As I released Violet-san she looked embarrassed.

“Now then, how do I get out?”

“…Do you want to leave?”

I started walking away and she followed me.

“In any case, I have to find a way out.”

The white sky continued to stretch throughout the journey. It seems there is no way out.

“Everyone will disappear.”

“Not everyone.”

“Everyone will die.”

“That's bound to happen.”

“Will you die too?”

“I won't die.”

At the moment, I'll live for 600 years. Beyond that, I'll still remain.

“Liar.”

“Maybe.”

“Don't go.”

“If I find a way out, can you come out with me? It would be easier if I blow it up.”

That's how the adult Violet-san disappeared.

“I can't go.”

“I see.”

“Don't go.”

“…We'll meet again.”

“Liar.”

“I'm not lying,”

“Then… hand that over.”

Violet pointed to my pocket.

I took out a red gem from my pocket.

“Hmm. This is mine.”

“It feels warm. It makes me feel calm.”

“It's just a regular piece of jewelry.”

“No, it's far from ordinary.”

“Is it?”

“Yes.”

At that moment, there was a sound of a door closing.

Violet-san trembled.

There are no doors anywhere in this white room. But I can hear it.

[Hey, where did you go?]

I also hear voices.

[Are you hiding? Come out!]

“I-I have to go.”

“Wait.”

The white space cracks.

[Stop it already! If you don't want to be tortured again…]

“Wait, I'll give you-”

I grabbed her hand, and then the white space crumbles into pieces.

“–this.”

The red gem I offered falls with a clinking sound.

I returned to the rooftop.

The white fog, the white space, and the girl in white clothes have disappeared.

I picked up the red gem that fell and put it in my pocket.

“Violet-san, is she around here?”

I emitted magic particles and searched for her presence.

But I couldn't find her.

Instead…

“This presence seems to be my sister and Alexia.”

What are they doing here?

* * *

“We have arrived. This way.”

Two shadows entered the library under the moonlight.

They were Alexia and Claire.

Alexia entered first, moving nervously.

Then…

“Hey, you're in my way!”

“Ouch!”

Claire went in first.

“What are you doing? I told you I would check it out first.”

Alexia was angry, whispering as she was stepped on.

“You'll be found out if you're slow like that. Fast means our matter is quickly completed.”

“Ah, geez. Get out of the way.”

Alexia stood up, moving Claire out of the way.

“Alexia, we have to move. We have to succeed no matter what.”

“You're very enthusiastic.”

“I have a reason not to give up. I have a place to return to…”

Claire clenched her hands with a confident look in her eyes.

“…I don't understand it that much, but it's good if you're that enthusiastic.”

Alexia led the way and unlocked the door at the back of the library.

“How did you get that key?”

“Authority.”

“So. So this is the forbidden library?”

The room was filled with thick books.

“No. This is the storage room of archives, what we're looking for is behind here.”

Alexia stopped in front of a large bookshelf.

“It's big. Are these ancient manuscripts…?”

“This bookshelf itself is an artifact. When I was young, there was a spell, from a fairytale that my father often read to me.”

“Spell?”

Alexia took a deep breath.

“Chu, chu, abracadabra open!”

There was silence for a moment.

“You're joking, right?”

“I-I'm not joking! I'm serious! This spell should open it!”

“You're such an idiot.”

“Maybe the spell is different. I thought the mantra was abracadabra.”

And then.

Gurururururu! A large bookshelf opened with a thunderous noise.

“Yeay… it really opened.”

“Seems like abracadabra is correct!”

Alexia said with a satisfied expression on her face.

“Cause it's old, so it takes some time.”

Alexia and Claire walked to the end of the large bookshelf.

“Woah…!”

They were just mesmerized as they entered the room.

Books lined up on sparkling hanging lights, which beautifully illuminated the towering, faded but unique books.

“So, which book contains the school history?”

Claire said, following the endless line of books with her eyes.

If searching one by one, it will take all night.

“Make a wish.”

“Don't joke around.”

“I'm not joking! Its like this…”

Alexia moved her arm strangely.

“What are you doing?”

“Creating the atmosphere, school history books, school history books, school history books… Abracadabra!”

“You're such an idiot.”

But in the next moment.

With a beam of light, a book flew by.

The book hovered in front of Alexia's face and automatically opened the first page.

“You're definitely joking…”

“See? I told you.”

“Stupid artifact. I want to destroy it.”

“Stop. This is a cute and obedient artifact.”

“So, what's written in that book?”

Claire looked fed up.

“Hmm. I can't read it.”

"This… is ancient writing."

“I can read simple ancient writing, but not this. How about Claire?”

“I only learned the basics in ancient writing. It's not a popular subject and only students from the academy of science study it.”

“Yeah, you're right.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Well, since it's like this… Abracadabra~ Translate!”

Alexia made a heart shape with her hands, accompanied by a snapping sound.

“Disgusting. Of course it's not possible.”

“You won't know until you try. Maybe there are some useful functions.”

[Y-Y-You're trying to translate it? Mwufufufu…]

A creepy voice was heard.

“Eh? It's talking!?”

“Who's there?”

They looked around, but there was no one else.

[I-I-I am the forbidden book, right? I-I can translate it for you.]

“As expected from a valuable school artifact.”

“Disgusting… this must be the voice of a fat person.”

“Hey, Claire, don't say something bad like that.”

[Uuhh… I-I'll stop translating…]

“Look, it's sulking.”

“Yeah, yeah, I apologize.”

“Forbidden book, please translate.”

[Mwufufufu… I-I'll do my best to translate! W-W-Which part do you want me to translate?]

“Alright, I want to know where Diabolos's right arm is sealed.”

[I-I-It's in the school basement. There's an underground ruin there.]

“Um… alright. That's easy…”

“…You're actually useful.”

The book that was in the air automatically shone with the translated words on its pages.

[O-Once upon a time a hero and Diabolos fought here, right? So Diabolos's right arm fell and was sealed. From there, many things happened and ruins were built.]

“Many things happened?”

[I hear there was a battle for the possession of Diabolos's right arm. It's not specified in detail, but it seems that the arm was hidden in the underground ruins for some reason.]

“How do we get to the underground ruins?”

[I hear there's a sealed church somewhere in the academy. You can reach there from there.]

“Where is that place?”

[Fuhuhu… I-I can't tell you what's not written.]

“Ugh, bothersome… For now, we know what the Diabolos cult is trying to do. They're trying to break the seal on the right arm.”

“Why are they capturing the students?”

“Possibly to break the seal. It would be easier to open the seal if it were close to the original magic that sealed it.”

”That's why they want to find the right magic in the students. Are we going to look for the sealed church?”

“…Before that, I'll try talking to my sister.”

Alexia said, as if she had made a decision.

“If you think about it, only you are acting. You should have done it from the beginning.”

“Do you think I didn't tell her anything?”

“Eh?”

“We've talked about it often. I told her about the school incident, the holy land incident, everything…”

“Alexia…”

“But… this time I have proof, and I'm sure my sister will believe me.”

[A-Alexia-chan, you can do it~]

“Shut up, it's disgusting, you know.”

Alexia glared at it with eyes that looked like they would kill someone.

[H-Hiiih…..!]

“Alexia… it's time to leave the forbidden library. If we stay here for too long, they'll find us.”

“Yeah, but before that, are there any books about the Diabolos cult?”

There was a short silence.

[…It's not here.]

“I see… can't help it”

“See you later.”

[B-bye bye. Be careful…]

Alexia and Claire's bodies were enveloped in magic, and then they both returned to the previous archive room.

“With this book, I'm sure my sister will…”

Alexia left the large bookshelf with the forbidden book in her arms.

At that moment.

“Where are you going with that forbidden book?”

“..!?”

Alexia and Claire turned around at the same time.

Standing behind the bookshelf was an old, tall man.

He had a long face and sunken eyes. He looked at them.

“Y-You're the head librarian…”

Alexia hid the forbidden book behind her back, but it was too late.

“Princess Alexia. Even if it's you, taking out a forbidden book without permission is a crime. Especially for the normal student beside you.”

Claire scowled as she looked at him.

Suspension or even expulsion. This could affect her younger brother as well.

“Kill him…?”

Claire said in a small voice. Her eyes were teary.

Alexia quickly pushed Claire away.

“There's a very strong reason for this! Can you listen to me for a moment?”

“If it's Princess Alexia's story, I can't not listen.”

“Thank you so much.”

“Let's move to a different location. Please follow me.”

The head librarian then left the library.

Alexia followed him, whispering to Claire behind her.

“Hey, what were you doing just now?”

“If I become a criminal, Cid will be bullied! They'll mock my little brother because I became a criminal! He's so fragile, he'll commit suicide…”

“That's not possible. Trust me.”

Alexia breathed out.

“Princess Alexia, please hurry.”

“Ah, I'll be there soon!”

Alexia pulled Claire's hand and ran after the librarian.

* * *

“Um, how far are we going?”

Alexia called out to the librarian, who was walking in front of her.

The tall figure moved through the dark corridor.

“We're almost there.”

“I could do it in the classroom if you want.”

“…In that case, let's do it here.”

Saying that, the librarian stopped.

They were in the middle of the corridor.

“Here?”

“Yes, I've prepared everything.”

He turned and laughed.

I don't like the way he's laughing, Alexia furrowed her brows.

“…Alexia.”

Claire, behind her, patted Alexia's shoulder.

“Fog…”

“Fog?”

Looking around, white fog had enveloped the corridor.

“Why is there fog here?”

The fog thickened quickly.

From somewhere, a cracking sound could be heard.

“This is just like when I was attacked…”

“The same?”

And then the world shattered.

The colors broke apart, as if cracked.

“W-What is this!?”

They should be in the school corridor, but the atmosphere was completely different.

The world was covered in white fog.

There was a fragrant smell coming from somewhere.

“Alexia, draw your sword.”

Claire urgently asks Alexia to draw her sword.

“We're surrounded.”

“Eh?”

As they search for whereabouts, they find several people behind the thick fog.

They gradually close the distance while looking at them. Those people don't seem to be in a friendly mood.

“I'm surprised you noticed, Claire.”

“These spirits are strong.”

“I see. So, head librarian.”

Alexia lowers her voice and directs her sword towards the librarian.

He stands there in the fog with a thin smile on his face.

“Yes, Princess Alexia?”

“What is the meaning of all this?”

Alexia is not so naive to trust him here.

“Oh dear, you're more alert than I thought.”

The head librarian draws a large sword from his scabbard.

One in the left hand and another in the right hand.

“That's a very dangerous weapon. I thought a librarian would fight with a pen and paper.”

“Pen and paper are idealism. Reality is built with a sword.”

With that, he holds the large sword in his hand.

“I'll take care of the librarian. Claire, you take care of the enemies around.”

“Okay.”

The two of them stand back to back, and the battle begins.

Two consecutive attacks from the white fog.

Alexia avoids the first attack by stepping back half a step and parries the follow-up attack.

“Oh?”

Alexia counterattacks the wide-eyed librarian.

The sword, which feels natural without feeling real, carves small scratches on the librarian's cheek.

“Wow, wow.”

He steps back and joins the ranks, then wipes the blood from his cheek.

“I'm very impressed. You move like a different person from the Princess Alexia that I know.”

There is honest admiration in the librarian's voice.

“Everyone's growing”

“Even if that's true, it's brilliant. A sword is imbued with the belief of the person who wields it, you used to just imitate Princess Iris. But now you've undergone a change. No, it's more accurate to describe it as something else mixed in with it.”

“Do you have time to analyze it?”

“Of course.”

“…Even this?”

Claire, behind him, says.

Several figures fall around her, which gradually disintegrate and disappear.

The librarian's eyebrows twitched in surprise.

“Seven ‘Second Sons’ have been defeated? Claire Kagenou. You are the winner of this year's Bushin Festival. I didn't think you were this strong, but it seems you're using some strange power.”

“…You saw it?”

"You're using red tentacles. Interesting.”

He didn't miss Claire's battle when fighting Alexia.

Alexia and Claire face the head librarian.

“Now it's two against one.”

“The situation has reversed.”

“Does it look like that?”

He has some gaps.

“You're strong. But we can both defeat you.”

“You're still young.”

“You can certainly handle it.”

“I surrender.”

“Surrender?”

“I surrender to the sword. The world is big. There are stronger ones. That's why I don't mind seeing swords as talented as yours. I'm sure you'll soon catch up to me.”

“If you surrender, just surrender. I'll make you tell us everything you know.”

Alexia says, and the librarian laughs thinly.

“Either way, you're still young. If you're not fixated on the sword, you can fight in other ways.”

“Eh?”

A sweet aroma tickles their noses.

And then, two overlapping voices, with a clang sound.

It's the sound of Alexia and Claire's swords falling to the ground.

“What…?”

“M-My power…”

“This sweet aroma is a potion that relaxes muscles and confuses magic.”

The librarian head looked at the two girls curled up on the ground, unable to withstand it.

“Don't you… fight with swords?”

“You're both talented and have a bright future.
That's why people like me can surprise you.”

The head librarian pulled out some rope and tied their arms.

“Tell me… why are you doing this…?”

“…I don't know why either.”

“You're strong. So why are you doing something like this…?”

“…There's someone stronger above me. My sword is already broken.”

“Broken…? What do you mean?”

He looked at her as if he were looking at a faraway place.

“There was once a spellsword man named [Fenrir]. Have you ever heard of him?”

“…No.”

“Surely there is. Everyone who lives in this country knows him.”

Alexia thought of the Bushin Festival participants and the rumored spell swordsman in other countries, but she didn't know who it was.

“This spell swordsman called [Fenrir], could he be from a legend?”

“That person called [Fenrir], He was once known as the strongest spell swordman and carved a name for himself throughout the world.”

“Wait! 'Fenrir' the spell swordsman who lived hundreds of years ago! We don't even know if he really existed.”

“He really exists. Additionally, he is still alive.”

“Still alive? Don't tell me he's a Diabolos follower.”

Alexia remembered the story she heard in the holy land.

There are people called 'Rounds' who have gained eternal life with the drop of Diabolos.

“You even know about Diabolos? As I expected. I can't let you two live,”

“What are you going to do to us…”

“Sacrifice. We don't intend to kill you immediately, it's because we haven't been able to recover many demon possessions recently.”

He took a bottle of liquid from his pocket and brought it to Alexia's mouth.

There was a pungent smell.

“In that case, sleep. Never wake up, sleep forever… ”

“Ugh…”

Alexia held her breath and turned her face away. Even so, her consciousness gradually faded.

“Alexia!”

“Clai…re.”

Then.

“*Clang*...” The sound of something being forcibly torn echoed around the area.

It felt as if the world was being torn apart by a strong pressure.

And then the ceiling cracked.

“What… is this?”

The head librarian put down the bottle and looked up.

A shadowy figure descended from the cracked ceiling.

“*Whup!*”

The sound of landing echoed and a black shadow appeared.

“You…”

“You're…”

A man stood within the white mist, wearing a long black metal robe.

“Shadow…!”

His long cloak fluttered as he slowly drew his sword.

The head librarian raised the large sword with a gloomy face.

“I'm sure there was no report of Shadow will appear in person.”

“…You have bad taste.”

Shadow looked towards the head librarian and said.

“Huh? What bad taste?”

“Your existence shows it.”

“…I don't care.”

The librarian's face changed. Then, he laughed as is laughing at himself.

“Life is not how it should be. I wandered in the swirls of water and then broke. And I live in a state that is shameful. If you say that I have bad taste, you are right.”

With a calm voice, the head librarian said.

“But, I also feel ashamed of my own disgrace.”

“Oh?”

“Shadow. You are the end of my journey. An end that is fitting for the fool who has destroyed his sword and betrayed his country.”

“…Are you ready for that?”

“I knew this would happen since Zenon was killed. At least in my final moments, I will face you as a swordsman.”

A large swing swept through the mist and attacked Shadow.

…The sword was filled with the conviction of many things.

The words of the head librarian echoed in Alexia's mind.

Indeed, his attack was shining beautifully.

”…Incredible.”

Shadow covered the light with his sword.

All he had to do was cover it.

The large swing shattered, in a blink and light.

“…Destroyed?”

All that was left was the hilt, which emitted a clanging sound.

Shadow swung his sword.

The sudden pressure of wind blew away the white mist.

The world cracked. With a creaking sound, the entire area was covered with cracks.

And then the world shattered.

As if it was all an illusion, the world returned to normal.

No, the head librarian, who lay in a pool of blood, showed that it was not an illusion.

“Shadow… Isn't even my match?”

The head librarian coughed and spat out a lot of blood.

“…This is still not at the highest level.”

Shadow disappeared into the long, jet-black robe.

“…So that is the sword of Shadow."

Claire muttered. She trembled from his power to fight the head librarian, who was strong enough, without making unnecessary movements.

“It's getting stronger…”

Alexia muttered with frustration.

Claire and Alexia work together to free themselves from the bindings and stand up. They then look towards the head librarian.

“Head librarian…”

“I am already… beyond saving.”

He has a deep wound on his chest.

“Are you possibly a renowned swordsman?”

Alexia couldn't help but ask. There is a beauty in his last attack that could only be possessed by the best.

“No… I am just a nameless swordsman.”

He answered, shaking his head.

Even Alexia could tell that was a lie. Looking at his arm, she sees an old scar.

“That arm…?”

“Cut off… Cult technology fused it back together but it doesn't move the same way anymore. I used to be able to wield a sword a bit more often.”

“Who cut it off?”

“By… Fenrir. My sword broke that day.”

“If I may ask, what happened?”

“Well… I'll tell you everything until the end of my life.”

He says, looking at his chest.

Alexia and Claire sit beside him.

“It happened when I was in this country's Order about fifty years ago…”

The head librarian looks up from the corridor to the misty night sky, as if trying to remember distant memories of the past.

“I won the Bushin Festival and joined the Order. I exposed injustices, captured criminals and was promised a future career.”

“So you truly are a great swordsman.”

“I just had a chance. So I found evidence of injustice that I shouldn't have touched. I found evidence of an infestation in the Kingdom of Midgar… no, throughout the world. Princess Alexia must be aware of it.”

"…The Diabolos Cult."

“Correct. At that time I didn't know about the Diabolos Cult. So I wrongly assumed that the Holy Church priests were committing fraud, that's why I went to the church.”

"Into the church?"

“I was still young. I believed that if it were true, everything would be settled. I wanted to bring justice to the corrupt Holy Church.”

Together with his subordinates, he investigates the church and tries to gather convincing evidence of violations.

But… Ordinary priests have no connection to injustice. They simply truly believe in the holy teachings and spread them.

The same applies to devout people. They are pure until the last level, followers of the holy priests.

Only a small fraction of high-ranking priests are dishonest.

They carefully watch the priests and discover a secret room in the basement of the church. Descending a long staircase, they find a terrifying sight.

A number of rotten people possessed by demons are locked up and groaning. They are injured and some of them have been implanted with something unknown.

In confusion, the door behind them closes.

It's a trap.

He defends himself with full concern.

Then he is thrown off by an extraordinary shock and rolls on the ground.

When he wakes up, he sees the corpses of his subordinates with their hands cut off and… a spellsword man ‘Fenrir’ standing in the middle of them.

He grasped his sword with his remaining right arm and swung it in anger at the swordsman. As a result, he also lost his right arm.

The Diabolos Cult is used to eliminating “justices” like him.

He looked down at the old scars on both his arms.

“That was an extraordinary power. Fenrir brought an unconscious woman in front of me when I fainted. She was my wife. As the champion of the Bushin Festival and a star of the Order, I must have been useful to the Cult. I sold my soul to the Diabolos Cult in exchange for my wife's safety…”

“What happened to your wife? If she is safe, I will protect her.”

“Thankfully, my wife passed away normally without knowing anything about it.”

“Didn't you try to fight back?”

The librarian shook his head sadly.

“The desire to fight back has been decided by these two arms. Princess Alexia, please be careful. You will walk the same path as me. What lies ahead is despair and an endless void.”

Alexia met the librarian's sharp gaze without turning away.

“…But I have to do it. As the princess of this country.”

The librarian narrowed his eyes with a smile on his face.

“You have become a great woman. So I have one last advice…”

The librarian let out blood from the corner of his mouth with a faint breath.

“Do you know the goal of the Diabolos Cult, Princess Alexia?”

“The resurrection of the Demon Diabolos, I believe.”

“Then why is the Cult trying to revive the Demon Diabolos?”

“Umm, that…”

Alexia lost her words.

She knew what the cult did, but she didn't really think about it until then.

“There are two reasons. One is to gain more power. The three heroes are all women. The demon possessions are also all women. The Diabolos cells are only customized for women. That's why the cult can only gain power through imperfect drugs.”

Saying this, the librarian took out a red pill from his pocket.

“That pill, Zenon also used it.”

“He's a poor student.”

“You didn't use it?”

“It's a shame for a swordsman… But the cult sees potential in this drug. They want to develop a perfect drug, one that doesn't have side effects and is very effective. That's why they've been studying the blood of heroes for years. If they can bring the demon Diabolos back to life, they might achieve it. They will have extraordinary powers that even surpass the heroes.”

“That's bad.”

“But the second reason is more serious for the cult. You know about Diabolos drops, right?”

“The drops that give eternal life?”

“Only twelve drops can be collected every year. If you drink the ‘Diabolos Drops’, it can stop aging for just one year. But currently, the number of drops is decreasing.”

“What do you mean, the quantity is decreasing?”

"I don't know the cause. But if the number continues to decrease, eternal life will soon disappear. For the leaders of the cult, this is something they will not tolerate. They want to revive the demon Diabolos so they can harvest ‘Diabolos Drops’ again in large numbers and perfect eternal life. They have ruled the world from the shadows and are still being run by a leader who has eternal life in his hands. But if the Diabolos Drops disappear, it will be destroyed **gasp**”

The librarian took a deep breath and looked at the moon in the night sky.

“Maybe it's not a coincidence that the Shadow Garden appeared in this era. The beginning of the end of a long reign. That's why you have to be careful… They are the strongest people in the world. Are they really… on the side of justice to protect the peace of the world?”

Alexia couldn't answer.

All that is known about the Shadow Garden is the fact that they hate the Diabolos cult. Besides that, almost everything else is a mystery.

“Maybe they… maybe they're trying to take everything from the cult…”

“Take? What are they taking?”

“Eternal life… and the world… **gasp** **gasp**!!”

“Head Librarian…”

“A-After the fall of the cult… they will rule the world… Haah… Shad… ow… **gasp**”

The head librarian vomited a lot of blood.

“Head Librarian…!”

“P-Princess Alexia…”

He breathed with pain and put together words.

“The future of this country… I entrust it to you…”

The librarian then breathed his last breath.

* * *

A beautiful woman with fiery red hair is currently examining the librarian's corpse.

She is Iris Midgar, the daughter of the Midgar Kingdom and Alexia's elder sister. Alexia had previously sent Claire away to explain the case to the Knights.

“Sis, the head librarian at the end of his life told me about the plans of the Diabolos cult. They are kidnapping students of the academy and the right arm of the demon Diabolos, which is sealed in this area…”

“That's enough.”

Iris interrupts Alexia's words carelessly.

“Eh?”

“I'm tired of hearing all your bullshit.”

“B-Bullshit?”

Alexia replies in surprise.

“Alexia, listen. There is no such thing as the Diabolos cult.”

Iris looks at Alexia with a serious look.

“No such thing… What's wrong with you, sis? We promised to continue investigating the Diabolos cult together…”

“Upon investigation, we found that the Diabolos cult doesn't exist.”

It wasn't Iris who said that.

It was a tall man standing beside her. His squinted eyes and pale skin gave him a scary appearance.

“Who are you?”

“Nice to meet you, Princess Alexia. My name is Hubb, the Vice Commander of the Crimson Order.”

“He's Glenn's replacement. He's a reliable man.”

“I feel honored.”

Iris praised Hubb, and he gave a faint smile.

“So, what do you mean the Diabolos cult doesn't exist? You should have gathered enough evidence by now.”

“Shadow Garden fabricated it all.”

“F-fabricated?”

“Shadow Garden has been committing a number of evil acts. Starting with the kidnapping of Princess Alexia, the attack on the school, the destruction of the holy land and the massacre in the Oriana Kingdom. There are many reports of other horrors around the world.”

“All of that is because of the Diabolos cult…!”

“…Shadow Garden fabricated an organization called the Diabolos cult and shifted the blame to them. They created a non-existent criminal organization to conceal their evil deeds.”

“Are you sure such wild thoughts can be accepted?”

“This is the proof.”

“Eh?”

Hubb handed a thick document to Alexia.

The cover of the document read: ‘Creation of the Diabolos cult by Shadow Garden.’

“A 34-year-old man admitted that he played a role as a follower of the Diabolos cult under the direction of Shadow Garden. His family was taken hostage, so he had no choice but to comply. A 28-year-old woman was kidnapped by Shadow Garden and forced to prepare materials for the Diabolos cult. A 47-year-old man…”

“Don't joke around…!!”

Alexia threw the document to the ground.

“How can you believe a piece of paper like this! This is nothing but fabrication!”

“Princess Alexia, I don't know what to say. But do you think they gave false testimony?”

“You can fabricate as much as you want!”

“Of course we have physical evidence. This is from Shadow Garden…”

“I'm tired of all of this!”

Hubb tried to give her something, but Alexia brushed off his arm.

Hubb's eyes narrowed.

“Sis, wake up. Why are you believing this person? Look at me!”

Iris turned away from Alexia, who was gripping her.

“You're the one who needs to wake up, Alexia.”

“Please, sis. Diabolos's right arm will be released soon!”

“You've been deceived by Shadow Garden. Everything you think is part of the Diabolos cult is a branch of Shadow Garden.”

“No, sis! Please, listen to me!!”

Alexia extended her hand to Iris, who turned away.

Slap!

Her hand was thrown away.

“Why…”

“My enemy is Shadow. Even though you're my sister, I won't hesitate if you get in my way.”

She then left.

“The Crimson Order are currently dealing with Shadow Garden. You have to understand us.”

Hubb said with a satisfied expression on his face.

Alexia stood in silence as she watched her sister walk away.

“Princess Alexia.”

When someone called her, she turned and saw a familiar face.

“Marco…”

He was young, but Glenn trusted him and even thought he would take his place.

“I am truly sorry, Princess Alexia.”

Marco said this without making eye contact, then walked away.

“Marco… You too?”

He did not answer that question. The knights moved the librarian's body.

The forbidden book fell from Alexia's hand.

* * *

In the white mist, a golden tail swayed.

‘Mm Mmm Mmm~’

You could even hear it singing.

Its steps were light like dancing. Surrounding it, pools of red blood spread, making a gurgling noise.

“Zeta-sama, your mood seems good.”

Zeta's singing stopped abruptly when a voice called out to it.

"Just when it was getting to the good part…”

“I apologize.”

“Mmm.”

Zeta twirled a bloody chakram around her finger.

“Please don't throw it.”

A young girl with a veil appeared from the white mist.

“I won't throw it, where is Victoria?”

"She's currently making plans.”

“Hm.”

“There's a report from Victoria-sama.”

“Hmm.”

Zeta, who had twirled the chakram, suddenly threw it into the air.

With a loud clang.

A fresh head of a man fell from above, cracked and broken, with an expression of surprise on its face.

“Amazing.”

“Hm.”

“There's a report from Victoria-sama.”

“Hmm.”

“It seems Shadow-sama has gotten involved in the matters of Princess Alexia and Claire.”

“Call her Claire ‘-sama’.”

The veiled girl trembled as the chakram cut through the air.

“I apologize.”

“Be careful. So, what did my Master do?”

“He's handling the head librarian and taking the two of them out of the holy place.”

“As expected. Now, Fenrir is cornered.”

“Yes. It seems like our next steps will be limited. What progress has Zeta-sama made?”

“Hm?”

“Regarding the ruins analysis.”

“Ah, it's already finished.”

“Already finished? It's only been a few days…”

“Eta's artifact was very helpful.”

Zeta said and pulled out an odd-looking palm-sized device.

As he flowed magic power into it, the device emitted a faint light.

“Magic flow visualization. You can understand where the flow is heading and what it means at a glance.”

Lights spread like thin threads. They twitched and pointed towards a red cylindrical light.

Inside the four lights were students, connected to thin tubes.

“They're trying to release the seal with their magic power.”

“It seems they don't have enough magic power.”

“Yes. That's why we need high-quality magic power from the descendants of heroes. About the cult sealing the Diabolos demon and how they created the ruins. I've more or less figured it out.”

“Then, are you done with it?”

“Hm.”

“What should we do? If we destroy the tubes, we can maintain the seal.”

The veiled girl asked, and Zeta thought for a moment.

But she didn't need to think, the answer was obvious. She just wanted to make sure she was ready.

“Don't destroy it.”

“Are you sure?”

“I've made my decision.”

With these words, Zeta walked out through the mist.

She passed the red light and placed her hand on the large door outside.

“The right arm of the demon Diabolos is sealed in the front.”

“What do you want to do?”

“I think I'll pay my respects to it as a souvenir.”

“Do you want to mark it?”

“That's also good. Zeta is ready.”

Zeta then flowed her magic into the door.

The door was inscribed with countless ancient characters, thick but layered.

“Can it open?'”

“I don't know, but she's the one who sealed the right arm of the demon here.”

“She?”

“I'm sure she'll respond.”

Zeta flowed more magic power.

The door shone red and spread into the room. The door shook slightly.

However, the door did not open.

A magic trail concentrated in front of the door, forming the figure of a person with a faint light like threads.

“Stay back.”

“Okay.”

Following Zeta's instruction, the veiled girl stepped back.

Finally, the faint light disappeared and there stood a woman.

Golden hair, golden cat ears, golden tail, and a figure resembling a cat had a striking resemblance to Zeta.

“That's…”

The veiled girl gasped.

“Nice to meet you, beastkin hero.”

“Zeta-sama, what is this…?”

“Because I know.”

Zeta said carelessly.

In that moment, the beastkin hero beheaded Zeta.

Zeta's head, which had flown far into the air, disappeared like black mist. At the same time, Zeta's body also disappeared.

White mist mixed with black mist, and from there, Zeta emerged.

She floated in the air, looking at the beastkin hero coldly.

“But I just wanted to make sure.”

Zeta said.

The beastkin hero did not respond. She just looked at Zeta, her emotions were non-existent.

“Do you remember the first time you met Master?”

Zeta asked the veiled girl, while floating.

“Of course. I could never forget that.”

The veiled girl clutched her chest and said.

“Neither do I. I've never forgotten that day.”

Zeta glared at the beastkin hero. As if remembering a distant past beyond her figure.

“I was a small kitten, picked up by my Master.”

That was Zeta's resolve.

“See you later, hero. I'll take a different path than you.”

Zeta turned on her heel.

The veiled girl rushed to follow her.

“Are you sure? But we haven't marked it yet.”

“Yes. We'll mark it next time. We have achieved our goal for now. We will watch from the shadows until the time comes.”

“Then, let's watch from the shadows.”

The two girls disappeared into the depths of the mist, exchanging words.

The beastkin hero looked at their backs.

I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
and hoped to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood,
"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence
in Shadow

I can't remember the moment anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow"
ever since I could remember.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene,
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,

The Eminence in Shadow
Volume Five
Chapter Three

Chapter 3

Case Closed, Let's Talk About Old Tales!

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Case Closed, Let’s Talk About Old Tales!

Wow, last night there was a frightening incident.

The perpetrator of the series of missing student cases is the school head librarian. It shocked me.

I witnessed the head librarian kidnapping my sister and Alexia, tying them in a mysterious mist. What a bad taste.

He turned out to be a pervert...

But regardless of his feelings conflicting with him being a pervert, he couldn’t stop the crime.

Everyone has their own life goals. But when those goals are rejected by society, one must make a choice.

Leading a life alone or committing suicide.

I am the former, and he was the latter.

Catching the scoundrel who caused the missing student cases red-handed was a really bad move for the “Eminence in Shadow ”, but, well, that’s the truth, so what can you do.

People from the Order come and go from the school in the morning. This may be an investigation into the head librarian case.

“Hmm? That is...”

There was a dark-haired female student walking with her head down as she passed the Knights.

“That’s Nee-san.”

I usually hide because it would be inconvenient if I was found, but it seems like that’s not necessary.

Because the situation is so busy, she won’t notice me here.

“Mm, Mmm, Mm~”

I bask in the cool morning light while singing a suitable melody.

I am a mob student who can be everywhere.

What kind of reaction would be appropriate when hearing about the librarian incident? Should I act shocked like a mob, or should I tremble in fear...?

I pass by while thinking about this.

“Wait!”

At that moment, she grabbed my neck.

“H-Hey, sis. You’re aware, right?”

I turned around and there she was, looking at me.

“Of course. Anything else to say?”

“M-Morning?”

“Morning, Cid. Anything else?”

I think for a moment and say that. I can’t think of anything else to say to my sister.

“I am under a lot of pressure.”

“Hmm?”

“I’ve hung my head and look depressed.”

“Oh...”

“The younger brother should have something to say to his elder sister who is under pressure.”

“Hmm.”

I think about it for three seconds.

“You don’t look well. Is something wrong?”

“...You almost passed.”

“Nearly passed, right.”

“Even more worried! And you should be able to guess what happened.”

“That’s impossible.”

“Alright, you’re curious, so I’ll tell you.”

“I never said I was curious...”

“You’re curious, aren’t you?”

“I’m so curious!”

I answered while being choked by my sister.

“It’s too noisy here, let’s move.”

“Um, what about class?”

“School is closed today.”

My sister said that and looked back at the school building.

“...Besides, the head librarian has died.”

She muttered meaningfully. I decided to act surprised like a mob.

I was elegantly sipping milk tea in the luxurious living room.

Apparently, this is a special room only for the upper class. Why was my sis, who is a village noble, allowed to enter? That's still a mystery.

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you the details. I don't want to involve you..."

She said that with a serious face.

"But the Order is trying to keep the truth about the head librarian in the dark... I can't do anything about it. It frustrates me..."

"The truth about the head librarian..."

It's because they're trying to hide the truth that the head librarian was a perverted person. For the honor of the head librarian, I support the efforts of the Knights.

"I think the truth doesn't always end well," I muttered.

"What do you mean, I'm wrong?"

My sister looked at me with a frightened gaze.

"I didn't say that. It's just..."

"Just what?"

I could feel her strong desire that she wouldn't let me off if I said something wrong.

"The world is always far between us. Not everyone can accept the depths of the darkness."

"So... In your opinion, it will be confusing if it is revealed to the public?"

"Maybe."

The students who use the library will be very hurt and confused.

"But it doesn't mean it's okay to bury the truth in the dark!"

"Of course not. That's why someone is needed to solve the case behind the scenes."

“Solving the case behind the scenes...”

“That’s right. Even if the truth is buried in the dark, it won’t end there.”

“So... Do you want me to solve this case?”

“No, Nee-san doesn’t need to do that.”

“I know the truth and can move freely... I am the one chosen.”

She tightened the bandage on her right hand.

“No, Nee-san is not chosen.”

“Cid, I am the only one who can protect you.”

“No, I can protect myself.”

“I know. You just don’t want me to worry.”

In a flash, she hugged me.

“I will protect Midgar Academy, this country, and you, Cid.”

“...That’s enough.”

“I will never let it end like this.”

I took a sip of milk tea while my older brother hugged me.

Milk tea is delicious too.

* * *

Because the school is closed today, Skel and Po rushed in as soon as I returned to the dormitory.

“It’s creepy, the case is really scary now. I didn’t expect the head librarian to be killed.”

“Right. Maybe it’s really from that organization.”

“This is no longer a joke.”

“Everyone looks very serious.”

Skel and Po are drinking high-quality coffee from Mitsugoshi and relaxing.

In my room.

“Shouldn’t you guys be working on extra homework?”

I said, putting pressure on them to go home earlier.

“That can wait, I have a lot of time now because the school is closed.”

“That’s true. Everything ends if you’re too busy with your homework to forget to enjoy a little happiness.”

The two of them sipped their coffee.

“What are you doing in my room?”

“Because there’s high-quality coffee made by Mitsugoshi in Cid’s room.”

“There are also some high-quality sweets made by Mitsugoshi.”

Jaga nonchalantly rummages through the drawer and opens a bag of chocolate.

“That’s mine.”

“No problem. We’re friends, right?”

“To be honest, I’m not sure I can buy this with my money.”

“I feel like something’s off now.”

Suddenly serious, Skel and Po turn around.

"T-This..."

Indeed, something is off.

The price of Mitsugoshi's high-quality coffee is more than 2,000 *zeni* per cup. It's really odd if the coffee is always available in my room as a poor noble.

Gamma seems to have just sent a lot of coffee.

"Cid, you're in debt, aren't you?"

"Huh?"

"If that's the case, you should have told me from the start."

"Eh? No, no. What debt?"

"Look, there's a poster in your room."

Skel showed me the poster.

"New service from Mitsugoshi Bank, 'Mitsugoshi Loan.' Just say you have a big debt."

"M-Mitsugoshi Loan...?"

I have a bad feeling about this and read the poster, which seems like a rolling loan service in my previous life.

If I remember correctly, I think I mentioned the loan service to Gamma.

"D-Don't tell me Skel and Po took out a loan?"

"Of course. I immediately borrowed two million *zeni*."

"I borrowed one million *zeni*. It feels great to pay off a monthly debt of 20,000 *zeni*."

"Ah..."

It's over, I thought.

“What’s wrong, Cid? You look like you realize something.”

“What’s the interest rate for the Mitsugoshi Loan?”

“The interest rate seems to be about 2% per month.”

“24% per year. That’s a low rate among borrowers in the capital.”

I looked at it differently.

“Borrowing one million zeni, paying 20,000 zeni every month, and 24% interest per year?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what’s wrong?...”

“Have you calculated when the repayment will be completed?”

One million *zeni* a year is 24%, so in one year it will earn 240,000 *zeni* in interest.

And per installment is 20,000 *zeni*, so 240,000 *zeni* in a year.

The interest for one year is 240,000 *zeni*, and the installments per year are also 240,000 *zeni*.

In other words, you just keep paying interest and the installments will never end.

“I don’t know, it’s been five years.”

“There’s no need to bother with calculations. You just need to pay 20 thousand *zeni* in installments every month.”

“Mitsugoshi Bank is very conscientious in saving us from math difficulties.”

“...I think you guys should raise the installments a bit more.”

“What are you talking about? Mitsugoshi just said it’s okay with 20 thousand *zeni*, so there’s no need to increase the installments.”

“That’s right. Rumor has it that some students borrowed 10 million *zeni*. It’s easy for nobles to borrow it, even if they are students. As long as they have assets at home, it’s fine.”

I looked up at the sky.

“Alright, we’d better get started.”

“We’re in debt, the rest you know yourself, right?”

Then, they both took out a deck of cards.

“...Poker?”

“What? Are you scared?”

“We won’t let you win and run away. We have a lot of debt in the bank.”

“No.”

I exhaled a deep breath.

“Double Push.”

Then I piled the wads of money high on the table.

* * *

“Damn it, remember this!”

“T-There’s no way... Y-You cheated! You must be cheating!”

Skel and Po shouted.

“Yeah, yeah, it’s getting late, so be quiet.”

I grabbed them by the neck and threw them into the corridor.

“Wait! One more time, last one!”

“I’m not satisfied yet! I can’t lose!”

“I’m sorry, I have no business with people who don’t even have money. I hope your installments go well.”

I closed the door and locked it.

“Why, I’ve been seriously practicing cheating.”

“No way. What do you mean all this failed in so many ways?”

“How could it?”

“Because it’s our only option...”

“Shit. I’m going to borrow some more from Mitsugoshi.”

I could hear them babbling on the other side of the door.

“Of course, I wipe out all cheating. And if they come to me with cheating, I have the right to cheat them back.”

I collected the wad of money piled up on the table and smiled.

“Skel and Po are my new piggy banks. Thank you, Mitsugoshi Loan.”

Money flowed from Mitsugoshi Bank to Skel and Po and I collected it.

This was the weak and the strong.

“Mm, Mm, Mm-”

I put a wad of money into my ambitious piggy bank box, while humming.

Then I called out to her through the window.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Zeta. You can come in.”

Then, without a sound, a golden-haired person appeared.

"Master, happy birthday."

"Hmm? Oh, yes. I'm already sixteen years old."

When I realized, the date had changed. Today is my birthday.

"Congratulations."

"Thank you."

I don't really want to be happy.

In this way, the life expectancy of one year out of a life expectancy of 600 years is reduced.

I haven't reached the peak of being a "Eminence in Shadow" yet, but how short life is.

"Do you hate birthdays, Master?"

"I don't like it because the time left in my life is decreasing."

"I know that feeling."

Zeta relaxed and smiled a little. It was a natural smile, unusual for her.

"Life is too short to accomplish my goals."

"Mm. I know."

She agreed again.

Then she looked at me with a serious face.

"I have something important to talk about tonight."

"Hmm."

About money?

Zeta has been very good to me, I might be able to lend her a thousand *zeni* or so.

“Master wants ‘eternal life’ right?”

“Of course.”

I answered her immediately.

If I have eternal life, I will reappear a hundred years from now, when people have forgotten me, and they will never suspect that I am a legend... I can play as much as I want. As long as I have life, I can rearrange the drama of “Eminence in Shadow” forever.

I plan to live six hundred years with my magic power, but that’s still not enough to enjoy life.

I want to live forever as myself. Oh God, please create a system to buy the lives of those who don’t want to live long.

“I know how Master feels.”

“Mm.”

“That’s why I’m trying to make it happen.”

“Mm?”

“Do you remember the first day we met?”

“Mm.”

I think it was raining.

“It was a cold and snowy day.”

That’s right, a cold and snowy day.

“When I was possessed, I realized how ugly those people were.”

“Mm.”

“And I thought about the people who had pushed us into this. Of this stupid world.”

She said, with a cold stare.

Ever since the first time we met, Zeta had given me that look. It was quite cool and I secretly imitated it too.

“Someone repeats their mistakes. Over and over again, without ever getting bored, and the world remains the same in its stupidity.”

“Mm.”

“I think it’s okay to die. If I die, nothing will change in this world. If I lived, nothing would change in this world. But when I met Master, I realized that I had to do something...”

With these words, Zeta began to tell an old story.

* * *

She was born into a famous group of beastkin among beastkin groups.

The Golden panther group.

It was said that if they mentioned their name, even the beastkin king would show respect.

The group consisted of many tribal groups and she was the eldest daughter born into a family headed by a hereditary chief. She was named Lilim back then.

Lilim’s excellence was outstanding from an early age, and she was raised with such care that it was better for her to remain in her family than to be given away as a bride.

The head of the group imported books for her and gave her an advanced education. This was unusual even among the relatively intelligent golden panther race.

She also loved books and hoped to eventually use her knowledge for the benefit of the group.

As such, Lilim developed quickly, beloved by her pack.

When she was twelve years old, something unusual happened.

She had a black lump in her stomach. It was small at first and didn't bother her. But gradually it spread and, worried, Lilim asked her mother.

Her mother turned pale.

Then, without saying a word, her mother called her father.

When he appeared, her father's face was also pale.

Here, Lilim realized that this was not an ordinary thing.

He examined Lilim's stomach and said in a low voice.

"...This is demon possession."

"Demon possession" Lilim pondered inside her head.

Being knowledgeable. Having read many books, Lilim was sure she knew more than most of her group.

But she could not connect that knowledge with the darkness in her stomach.

Demon possession.

Again and again, and again.

And Lilim suddenly burst into tears.

She knew.

As she accepted the reality, she also realized what would happen to her in the future.

Demon possession was a curse. Defilement must be cleansed before it spreads. That was the law of the family.

The problem was that the filth had been born from a very high member of the golden panther pack, and the bloodline of the pack head at the time. This matter was not just about him. This would be a big problem that shook the group.

“Father, please burn me at the stake.”

Lilim wiped away her tears as she spoke.

“But...”

“The bruise on my stomach isn’t that big. The filth is still small. If you burn me now, you can protect this house. I’m sure the whole family will agree.”

“But...!”

“Father, please. It’s for the sake of the family. It’s also for my brother’s sake.”

Lillim looked at the baby in her mother’s arms-the precious treasure that would be the heir to this family, born exactly six months ago.

“Please... Please, please.”

Lilim bowed her head and pleaded.

“...I can’t.”

“Father!”

“No! It’s in the elf book. It says there’s a way to cure demon possession.”

“I can’t believe it!”

“It says there is a potion that cures demon possession.”

After that, her father hurriedly began to rummage through the pile of books.

To Lilim, his back looked much smaller than usual.

“What’s wrong? Father, please don’t cling there. You shouldn’t cling to something like that. Mom, please say something.”

But her mother didn’t say anything, keeping her face down.

“Look. It’s written here.”

“Father! That’s enough!”

After saying that, Lilim’s words stopped.

Drops of water dripped onto the book her father held out. Lilim saw her tears for the first time.

“Father...”

“I will definitely find it. So believe in your father and wait for me.”

“Father...!”

She hugged her father, enveloped by his warm arms.

Her mother joined them.

“Father... Mother...”

The tears she had been holding back flowed from Lilim’s eyes.

The next day, her father began his journey.

“He said he’ll be back in a month. You have to hide it because you’re already suspected. You can’t go out at all.”

Her mother said, wrapping a bandage around Lilim’s stomach.

“Yes, Mother.”

“Don’t worry, take it easy. I’ll take care of the house.”

Her mother smiled gently.

Lilim smiled too, as she touched the bandage her mother had wrapped around her. She felt that it would go well.

* * *

A month later...

Lilim was woken up in the middle of the night.

“There’s a commotion outside. Maybe father is back.” Lilim was led outside by her mother.

Her father was there.

He was on his knees, tied with a rope.

“Father...?”

Countless torches surrounded her father. Blood stains stained his clothes.

“Everyone, what is the meaning of this?”

Her mother spoke in a bold voice.

“Looks like the filth hasn’t left the group yet.”

The one who stepped forward from the crowd of torches was the branch family head of the golden panther group.

“The filth must be cleaned up at once. That is the law.”

“......”

Her mother stood silently in front of Lilim.

“Where is the filthy one? Answer me.”

The man from the branch family thrust his sword into her father’s shoulder.

“...I don’t know.”

Her father spoke in a hoarse voice.

“I see.”

The man from the branch family thrust his sword into his father's shoulder.

Blood gushed out, and there was the sound of bones breaking.

His father did not raise his voice. His face was downcast, and he didn't move an inch.

"How boring."

With that, the man from the branch family stabbed his sword again.

"Stop it! You won't be forgiven for swinging your sword at the head of the group!"

"I will be forgiven. I am the new head of the golden panther group. He betrayed his family."

"What proof do you have...?"

"A priest from the Holy Church came to the village and told me about the existence of traces of demon possession. Apparently, in the east, the Holy Church collects demon possessions and cleans up their filth."

A new man stepped out from the group. The man wore a priest's outfit and smiled faintly.

"The filth must be cleaned up immediately. If left alone, the filth will spread throughout the village and cause destruction."

".... Liar."

It was her father's hoarse voice that interrupted the priest.

"Did you say something, beastkin?"

"I said you're lying, human."

Father received the priest's mocking gaze directly.

"What made me lie?"

"Everything. Demon possession is the nonsense of the Holy Church."

“That’s an interesting thing to say. You seem to have lost your mind.”

A man from the branch family sneered at his father.

As if provoked, sneers came from all around him. Neither Lillim nor Lillim’s mother understood what their father was saying.

Only the priest and his father stared at each other the entire time without averting their eyes.

“Do you have any evidence for this, beastkin?”

“The golden panther group is a long-established bloodline. Its chieftain has inherited the story of a great hero. This is the story of the hero beastkin, one of the three heroes who fought the demon Diabolos.”

“A fairy tale, huh?”

“Yes, it is a fairy tale. However, it is slightly different from the fairy tales passed down in the world. The three heroes are women, not men, and demon possession is considered a blessing, not a curse.”

“That statement is considered an act of blasphemy against the Holy Church.”

The priest’s gaze sharpened.

“I’ve long been curious about this. A fairy tale passed down in the world and a fairy tale passed down in the golden panther group. Why are the two so different?”

“Nonsense. Fairy tales will fade with time.”

“Is that so? This is a heroic tale that has been passed down only to the heads of the group for generations. It will not fade away easily. Above all, we are a group of golden panthers. Descendants of Lili, the hero of the golden panther pack, one of the three heroes who subdued the demon Diabolos. That’s the answer.”

“....In other words?”

“The stories of the heroes passed down to the golden panther pack are the truth. The Holy Church distorted the truth.”

Her father said that with unblinking eyes.

Silence enveloped the area for a while.

Before long, a small chuckle echoed throughout the village into loud laughter.

“Kuhahahaha, interesting, interesting! It’s been a long time since I laughed this hard!”

A man from the branch family held his stomach and laughed.

“This is interesting.”

The priest also smiled, but the look in his eyes did not show a happy expression.

“I see, I see. So this is what you meant. Those who are possessed are the playthings of the Holy Church, and they are actually the descendants of a hero. That is why there is no need to purify the filth. Is that what you meant?”

The man from the branch family laughed as he spoke.

“...That’s right.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!”

An angry roar sounded.

“Do you want to endanger your family with your stupid delusion?!”

“You may not believe it, but this is the truth...!”

“Don’t be stupid!”

The fist of a man from the branch family slammed into her father’s cheek. Again and again and again.

Lilim could not move. Her knees trembled, and she just cowered.

“Now, the show is over.”

While wiping his reddened fist, the man from the branch family spoke.

“Where’s the filthy one?”

“...!”

Father had a small smile at the corner of his lips.

“If you don’t tell me, I’ll burn everything at once.”

“It’ll all be the same if I tell you. You just want to torture me.”

The man from the branch family fell silent with his answer.

“Then, I’ll do what you want.”

The man from the branch family drew his sword.

“S-Stop it!”

Everyone’s eyes fell on Lilim.

“I-I...I....I...”

Lilim’s knees trembled violently.

“I-I was... agh, the demon...”

Lilim let out a sound of regret.

Her vision was blurred with tears.

In the midst of it all, her eyes met those of her father, who was looking straight at her.

“Listen to me.”

His father’s voice was very soft.

“The golden panther group is the descendant of Lili, the hero who once saved the world. This family is a family with proud blood. Why did Lili give us stories of heroes? Did she just let the chieftain pass them down from generation to generation? There is a reason for that. We have a mission.”

“Father...!”

“You have the blood of a hero in your veins stronger than anyone else. You are a strong, wise, and proud daughter. Lilim, go to the east. There is someone in the Kingdom of Midgar who will cure demonic possession. That’s where our mission lies.”

“F-Father... I...”

“I’m sure Lilim can do it.”

With that, her father looked at her mother.

“Take care of them.”

Her mother gave a small nod and pulled Lilim closer.

“You think I’ll let you go?”

They were already surrounded by beastkin.

“I’ll let them escape. Even if it costs me my life...”

There was a rattling sound, like something was pulsing.

It was coming from her father’s body. Something was pulsing inside him.

The next moment, her father’s bonds burst open and a large amount of magic energy overflowed.

“W-What power is that!?”

The man from the branch family shouted.

“The golden panthers group still have thick beastkin blood. I manipulated and freed them.”

My father’s golden hair had grown.

It was like a mane, as if turning from a human into a beast.

“N-No way. That’s not...!”

“This technique, passed down only to the chief, is a forbidden technique that can take their life.”

Her father cried tears of blood.

His muscles twitched.

Blood gushed out of his veins.

“Go away!”

Then he turned into a rampaging beast, destroying the beastkin dwellings.

Her father stood before Lilim and the others to protect them.

“Go!!! Run!”

“Father, come with me!!!”

“I can’t!!!”

Lilim was surprised to see her father’s face when he turned around.

“...!”

Her father’s face had become half-beast.

“Your father will eventually become a beast. Before that happens...”

“I... I don’t want to! Father!”

Lilim reached for her father’s back, but couldn’t reach it.

“That’s an interesting power. I didn’t think there would be descendants of that creature here.”

The priest had swung the dark red chain and slashed at him.

“Gaaaaah!!!”

Her father’s right arm deflected the chain.

The barbed iron at the end of the chain exploded.

“This is amazing...! It looks like collecting demon possession will be an unexpected advantage.”

“Go, Lilim!!! Run!!!”

Her father and the priest fought.

At that moment, her mother picked her up and ran away

“Father... No, nooo!!!”

That was the last time Lilim saw her father’s back.

* * *

Her mother, carrying Lilim, was running through the dense forest.

She didn’t hear any footsteps. Her mother was a master of hiding.

However, the presence of pursuers was gradually approaching.

Some members of the golden panther group had special noses. They must have joined the pursuers.

“Let’s split up.”

Her mother stopped in front of the river and set Lilim down. The forest was cold at night, and the snow fell with a flicker.

“Mother will follow the river to the southeast. Lilim, cross the river and head east.”

With that, her mother entrusted the little brother she was carrying to Lilim.

“Take care of your brother, Lilim.”

“I don’t want to! I want to stay with Mother!”

“Don’t be selfish. Just have a little patience. We’ll meet again in the Midgar Kingdom.”

Her mother hugged Lilim tightly.

“Then... why did you entrust brother to me?”

“Lilim...”

“I can’t fight. I can’t run as well as you.”

“Lilim, listen.”

“You should be better off with me!”

“Listen to me, Lilim!!”

“No...!”

Lilim buried her face in her mother’s chest and shook her head.

“Lilim...”

“Had I not been possessed by a demon, had I been burnt at the stake... Father would have been... All my fault...!”

“He changed when Lilim was born. He always held the sword, but when I saw him reading stories to you, I thought he’d lost his hold. He always said that you were a smart girl.”

“Father...!”

“Seeing you grow up is our greatest happiness. Lilim... You may not be able to fight. But you are a very smart girl. You have the knowledge to overcome difficulties. So don’t worry.”

“Mother...!”

“Lilim, please take care of your brother.”

Mom held out her brother. The baby, who knew nothing, stared blankly at Lilim.

Lilim hugged the baby, tears running down her cheeks.

“Thank you, Lilim. We’ve been happy since you were born.”

“Mother... I promise you, in the Midgar Kingdom...!”

“Lilim, go. Cross the river and remove the smell.”

Lilim dispelled the smell in the shallow river, turning back again and again as she went deeper into the eastern forest.

Her mother watched her go, then ran along the river to the southeast.

The loud footsteps echoed throughout the forest throughout the night.

* * *

In the east.

As if moved by something, she headed east.

Lilim ran through the dark forest. The winter nights were cold, and her arms and legs were icy.

Then, just before dawn, she walked through the forest.

“This...”

It was the first time she saw the beach, and the endless expanse of water. But because of her knowledge, Lilim knew.

“...The ocean.”

She licked the seawater to confirm it.

“Salty.”

There was no mistaking it.

“Father... There’s nothing.”

She exhaled a white breath in the sky. Snow fell from the sky.

She sat on the cold beach and bowed her head.

“There’s... nothing to the east. Where is the mission...? Where is the Midgar Kingdom...? Mother?”

Her legs felt like sticks, and she could not take another step.

Black bruises extended all the way to her chest. It caused her pain.

Her arms held her brother . Lilim had to protect the little life entrusted to her.

“Let’s go.... Let’s cross the sea.”

She knew there was a land across the sea. She didn’t know if it was the Kingdom of Midgar, but her father said it was, so she was sure it was true.

Her mother was waiting there. Maybe her father was there too.

Lilim started walking again.

At that moment...

“Oh my, so this is where you are.”

The priest stood in front of Lilim, his bloody chains jingling.

“Get-away...!”

She backed away on shaky legs.

“Well, now, on to the question. Which one is possessed?”

The priest raised the severed head with a twisted smile.

“It’s not this guy.”

“F-Fatherrr!!!”

It was her father’s severed head.

His bloodied neck gave the impression of a struggling end to his life.

“Neither is this woman.”

The priest raised another severed head as he spoke.

“Mother!!!”

It was her mother’s severed head.

Her mother was dead, her eyes wide open, staring at something.

“Why... Why?!”

“There are only two left.”

The priest threw away their heads and walked towards Lilim.

“Noooo... Father... Mother...!”

“Cases of demon possession in men are very few, but it’s not zero.”

“Ngh... S-Stop... D-Don’t touch my brother!”

Lilim hugged her brother, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“In that case, which one of you is possessed?”

“Me... I’m the possessed one, so please, not my brother...!”

“Good girl. I’m glad you’re honest.”

With that, the priest stroked Lilim’s head with his blood-stained hand.

“Hiih......!”

“We’ll probably know each other for a long time. So allow me to introduce myself. I am a high-ranking priest, Petos. You will be a valuable test subject.”

“T-Then... My brother...”

“Don’t worry. I have no business with children who are not possessed.”

Then, Petos stroked her brother’s neck with his chain.

“So I won’t let him suffer. I’ll kill him painlessly.”

Blood sprayed everywhere.

Her brother’s head fell from Lilim’s arms.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!”

“Kukukuku. Now, let’s celebrate.”

Petos let out a mocking laugh as he looked down at Lilim who was screaming

“Aaaaaaaahhh, why, why!”

“Today is a wonderful day. Thanks to you, the path to Rounds will be open.”

Lilim picked up the three heads that had fallen to the ground.

Her father, mother, and
brother.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh... I’ll kill you... I’ll definitely kill you!!!”

Lilim shouted, her eyes filled with hatred.

But Petos ignored Lilim and turned his back on her.

"Are you done?"

Then came the sound of a call from the forest. Just then, a group of people wearing strange robes appeared.

"Yes, every one of them."

"Show me."

Countless severed heads fell on the beach. They were all the heads of the golden panther group.

"We have taken care of all the members of the golden panther group. So there will be no information leakage."

"I see. That's good."

Those were the words directed at Lilim.

"Your father's enemy is also dead."

Petos smiled and threw the severed head at her. It was the head of the branch family leader.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!"

Lilim kicked off the beach and lunged towards Petos.

However, Petos' chain sent Lilim flying.

"**cough**... K-Kill... me..."

There was no strength whatsoever in her body. Her consciousness began to fade.

"Capture her and send her to Valliora's laboratory. I'll prepare the preparations for the faction."

It was then that Lilim's consciousness disappeared.

* * *

When Lilim woke up, she found herself in a carriage.

Her arms and legs were bound. Her mouth was covered in blood.

“I’ll kill you all... I swear.”

As she muttered, the man on guard snorted with a “Huh?”

“I’ll kill you...!”

Her tears had already dried up.

The only thing supporting her was hatred.

What she needed was strength.

Knowledge was useless. Nothing could protect them. Pure power was what paved the way for them.

“I want power...!”

Lilim wished.

The power to break this bond, the power to kill that priest, and—

[You want power?]

A voice sounded from somewhere.

“Ah...?”

She scanned her surroundings, but apart from the man on guard, there was no one there.

[Do you want power?]

This time, she heard it clearly. It was a low voice that sounded like it came from the abyss.

“I want it...! If only I had the power... If only I had the power!!!”

“Haha, that girl has gone crazy.”

The man on guard didn’t seem to hear, but clearly the voice reached Lilim’s ears.

Even if this was a hallucination, or a demon, it didn’t matter to her.

She just wanted power.

“If you want power, I’ll give it to you.”

And then, bluish-purple magic energy appeared inside the carriage.

“W-What is this light...!?”

The carriage stopped, and the soldiers entered from outside.

“What’s going on?! What is this magic energy?!”

The bluish-purple magic energy turned into fine grains, forming a spiral pattern.

A human shadow appeared in the center of the spiral... a boy wearing a long jet-black robe.

“How did he get into the carriage?!”

“Catch him! Get him off the train!”

[I Am...]

The boy raised his jet black sword in the center of the mana.

The atmosphere trembled from the immense magic energy.

Lilim saw tremendous power gathering on that jet-black sword.

This was what she was looking for.

The power to destroy everything.

[Atomic Test].

The magic exploded.

The sound faded away, and the world was colored with a bluish-purple light.

* * *

“...I gave it sixty points. It’s still not perfect.”

The boy’s voice woke Lilim up. She seemed to have fainted.

“It still can’t reach it. I’ve been aiming...”

He muttered in the center of the huge crater.

The carriage had been destroyed, and the terrifying group of people had vanished without a trace.

Lilim was trembling.

However, that feeling was not fear.

“U-Umm...”

“Hm? You’re already awake. For now, let’s dispel the possession first.”

With that, he cast his bluish-purple magic.

The magic warmly enveloped Lilim’s black bruises and glowed.

The bluish purple magic energy regenerated her skin as if rewinding time.

“Impossible... That’s impossible.”

When the light subsided, the black bruise had disappeared cleanly.

The demonic possession that tormented Lilim had been cured with ease.

“I’ll give this one ninety-five points. The control is near perfect. Even though it’s tiring.”

“I wasn’t wrong...”

Tears flowed from the bottom of her heart.

“I wasn’t wrong... Father weren’t wrong either...”

“Hm?”

“I heard that demon possession is a sign of a hero’s bloodline... there are people in the east who can cure demon possession... None of that is wrong.”

“So the fictional setting has got here...”

“Then why...? Why Father, why Mother...? Why...? They’re not at fault...!”

The boy scratched his head.

“....It’s because of the Diabolos Cult. It’s all the Diabolos Cult’s fault.”

“Diabolos Cult...?”

“That’s right. Those people are not from the Holy Church. They were actually from the Diabolos Cult. They hid the truth, buried the hero’s descendants in the darkness of history, and tried to revive the demon Diabolos. The hero’s descendants are an obstacle to them.”

As he spoke, his long jet-black robes fluttered.

“We are Shadow Garden. We lurk in the darkness, and hunt in the shadows.”

“Lurk in the darkness and hunt in the shadows...”

Lilim’s heart trembled.

She felt everything was connected.

“Father is not wrong at all.”

“That’s right.”

“There’s someone in the Midgar Kingdom who can cure demonic possession. That’s where our mission lies, that’s what Father said.”

“Hm? I see.”

“You are my mission.”

Yes, this is her mission.
Her father’s death, her mother’s death, and her brother’s death.

They had sacrificed their lives to protect Lilim.

“I want the power... I want the power to hunt them down!”

“Alright. She’ll be here soon.”

“She...?”

Then, the darkness of the night gave way.

She was a beautiful blonde elf, clad in a jet black bodysuit.

“I told you to wait a moment! We can’t keep up with your speed.”

She seemed to be in a bad mood.

“But the mission is over.”

“I can tell just by looking. It looks like it was a cult carriage, even though it was destroyed. I always tell you to leave evidence behind.”

An elven girl gave the boy an annoyed look.

The boy scratched his head.

The elven girl let out a resigned sigh.

“So, this time, she...”

She looked at Lilim.

“That’s right. I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Eh? Wait!”

“Just ask Alpha for more details.”

Leaving those words behind, he suddenly disappeared.

“Oh my! Always leaving just like that.”

“Um... You are?”

When Lilim asked, she smiled gently.

“Sorry for startling you. I’m Alpha. I’m the first seat in Shadow Garden. Nice to meet you.”

“Alpha... my name is...”

Alpha stopped Lilim from introducing herself.

“Wait. You’ll be living under a different name from now on.”

“Eh?”

“We all lurk in the darkness and chase shadows. For us, appearances are only temporary. The shadows are our true form. We may never be able to return to the surface world again...”

Saying that, Alpha held the mask in her hand.

Her beautiful, clear blue eyes were fixed on Lilim.

“If you’re ready for that, accept it. The sixth seat of Shadow Garden, Zeta.”

“Zeta... I’m Zeta...”

Lilim muttered as if biting.

“You seem to be ready. You have sharp eyes. But...”

“...I want power.”

“You have more than enough potential. You will eventually gain great power. But that hatred will one day...”

Alpha stopped in mid-sentence.

She stared at Lilim with those blue eyes for a while. And then...

“No, it’s nothing.”

She said sadly. White snow continued to fall quietly from the night sky.

* * *

“Yes, it was hard.”

When Zeta finished telling everything, she said it while looking outside.

Her words were blunt.

But they seemed to cover everything. After all, Zeta wasn't looking for any sympathy.

"Yes, that's the case."

That was why Zeta answered casually.

The hatred she felt that day pushed deep into her heart and closed it. Unnecessary emotions interfered with her plans.

At some point, the number of her words had been reduced so that her emotions would not leak out in the blink of an eye.

It seemed like that was the change Zeta wanted. Because it felt like she was slowly approaching her goal, following the changes in her emotions and body.

"I was an abandoned cat. A little kitten who was picked up. That's why I've been thinking about the world that master wants. Master didn't tell me much. It was a little difficult for me."

"I see."

"Yes. That's right."

He was holding a wine glass.

Zeta quickly prepared the wine and poured it into the glass. Then she curled up beside him.

"Master wants eternal life. Now I know what that means."

"You understand it well."

"Master looks far into the future. The same is true for me."

"I see..."

He saw the deep darkness outside the window. Zeta also saw the deep darkness outside the window.

“I will awaken the demon Diabolos.”

“...I see.”

“As I suspected, you will not stop me.”

“I don’t intend to stand in the way of that choice.”

“Master is too kind. That is why she cannot make that choice.”

“Really?”

“The world does not run on kindness. That kindness lies with Master.”

“...I’m curious too.”

“Yes. I am not kind. Even if I harm the world, I will resurrect it.”

“...Everyone will hate you anyway.”

“I don’t care. Because that’s what the world needs.”

Zeta leaned reluctantly on his shoulder.

“...I will be hated by the world on behalf of my master. Because that is my mission.”

“I see...”

Zeta backed away from him.

“When the time comes, you can get rid of me...”

With those words, she disappeared into the night.

* * *

Zeta stood on the rooftop at night, looking down at the school. Her golden tail was blowing in the winter wind.

"...The time has come."

Zeta muttered.

"It has come, huh?"

"You've made your decision, right?"

There were two shadows behind Zeta.

One belonged to Victoria. The other was a hooded girl.

"I will resurrect the Demon Diabolos."

Zeta said.

"What did Shadow-sama say?"

Victoria asked.

"We were just talking. That's all."

"And you didn't get permission?"

"I didn't intend to get it in the first place. It's just that, I would have stopped if he had stopped me."

"In other words, Shadow-sama won't stop you?"

Victoria smiled.

"Yes. From here on, everything is in my hands."
"You will betray Shadow Garden."

"I don't care. Alpha is too good. She has no vision after defeating the cult. But I'm different."

She narrowed her ice purple eyes.

“I will resurrect the demon Diabolos and gain eternal life. And he will rule the world.”

“Then Shadow-sama will become a god.”

Victoria’s cheeks flushed with fascination.

“...Everyone will hate you.”

The hooded girl, who had been silent all this time, said.

“Master seeks eternal life. I will bear all sins.”

“In that case, shall we go? Glory to Shadow-sama.”

“...We will continue with the plan.”

Victoria and the hooded girl disappeared silently.

Only Zeta remained on the roof.

She stared down at the lights of the academy.

“He will take everything. Eternal life, control of the world. And... a whole world where no mistakes will ever happen again...”

The lights of the academy flickered in the darkness of the night. Just as the torchlight of that day brought back memories for Zeta.

“This is my mission...”

She hugged herself tightly, as if to confirm it.

It’s okay, my knees aren’t shaking.

Her mind was calm.

She exhaled a deep white breath into the night sky.

“Father... Mother... I’m getting stronger.”

She murmured to herself.

I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
and hoped to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood,
"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence
in Shadow

I can't remember the moment anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow"
ever since I could remember.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene,
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more

The Eminence in Shadow
Volume Five
Chapter Four

Today the World is at Peace Again!

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Today the World is at Peace Again!

“Infiltrating the deepest parts, yes...”

Fenrir muttered through the white mist.

A pool of blood and two footprints still remained in front of the intact device.

“They should be able to destroy that device. Did they realize it didn’t have enough magic power flowing through it...? No, even if they realized it, it should have been destroyed anyway.”

Bloody footprints led through the device to a door at the back.

“The door won’t open unless the seal is broken. I don’t know what they came in for...”

Fenrir walked to the door where the Diabolos’ right arm was sealed.

He then realized that the defense system had been activated.

“Maybe Lili has expelled him.”

That was the only reason he could think of.

In any case, Shadow Garden would appear again. There was not much time left.

“...You seem to be in trouble.”

At that moment, a voice echoed from the white mist. Fenrir immediately turned around and drew his sword. The mist parted under the pressure of the sword.

There was a priest there.

“Oh, scary.”

He smiled faintly.

“Petos huh... At least say hello. I almost killed you.”

“It’s been a long time, Fenrir-sama Fifth Seat of the Rounds. Your sword skills are impressive. I was surprised.”

“...Hmph.”

The previous attack Fenrir had launched was done with the intent to kill. If he had been in his original strength, Petos would not have been able to avoid it.

But Petos was not injured. He was a less pleasant person.

“If we fight properly, I won’t be able to win.”

“I wonder if you’re the kind of guy who would fight properly. Tenth seat of the Rounds, Petos-kun.”

Fenrir said as if he wanted to vomit.

“So, what do you want?

“You seem to be in trouble. I feel I can help you.”

“Do you think I would hire a stranger like you?”

Fenrir giggled.

“Oh, I feel offended that you call me a foreigner. I am only loyal to the cult.”

He said and Petos’ smile deepened.

“Let me ask you one more time. What are you doing here, Petos? We are not close enough for small talk.”

The smile disappeared from Petos’ face as Fenrir displayed his murderous lust.

“The repeated failures of Fenrir’s faction have become a problem at the Round Table. Apparently, the removal of the right arm seal has also been delayed.”

Petos glanced at the cylindrical device.

“I think the process is already 60%.”

“60% huh... As you know, the collapse of the holy land has released the seal of the left arm. This year, the number of drops is expected to drop even further.”

“So Aurora refused completely.”

“Yes, the amount produced is not as much as in previous years. She continues to resist. Perhaps, being released brought her back to her senses.”

“Troublesome... so, how many drops are there?”

“Nine... That’s what was estimated, but it might turn out to be eight. Fortunately, thanks to Shadow Garden, the number of Rounds itself has been reduced, but... Oops, that was inappropriate.”

Petos giggled at what was funny.

“If the number of blood drops is less than expected... Or if new Rounds are appointed. Fenrir-sama, there will be no drops for you this year.”

“You’re getting tough, Petos.”

Fenrir drew his deadly sword.

It sliced through Petos’ coat, creating a thin stream of blood around his neck.

“Oops...”

“You think your position is equal to mine as a newcomer?”

"This was decided at the Round Table. I only came to inform you of that. The Round Table takes the failure of Fenrir's faction seriously."

Fenrir suppressed his killing desire with a slight click of his tongue.

"...Did Loki do it?"

Loki had long had a rivalry with Fenrir.

"Loki-sama was also... present at the meeting."

"You agree just like that, Petos? You might lose a drop for yourself."

"No, I have always been on Fenrir-sama's side."

"It was the cult's fault for ignoring the Shadow Garden in the first place. About five years ago, this was first reported. An attack on a demon possessed carriage by an unknown group. If we had handled it there, we wouldn't have allowed it to flourish like it has today."

"...What goes around comes around."

"As a result of sitting cross-legged on eternal life, the Cult has become as boring as a fat pig. Other than the two seats that were originally vacant, Nelson and Mordred have fallen. Honestly, Rounds' quality has plummeted. You are nothing more than a substitute. Normally, you wouldn't be able to become Rounds."

"On the other hand, I owe Shadow Garden a lot for becoming Rounds, I thank them."

Petos said mockingly.

"Sorry, my mouth dropped open... But the Round Table has finally risen from its heavy seat. They're serious."

"The plan... [Shadow Hunt] huh?"

"Will it work?"

"I don't like Loki as a leader, but this is a good start. We'll have to wait and see. Is Shadow's power really real?"

“...Do you think it’s fake?”

“I’m not saying that. But if it’s real, it’s too far from reality. Whether it’s a legendary artifact, perhaps a human from the demon world, or possessing the same technology as a cult...”

“What if it’s a normal human?”

“That would be the true pinnacle of power. If his power is real, I want to see it. After all, it’s been hundreds of years since the Round Table last worked together. You’ll learn what that means sooner or later...”

Fenrir smiled wryly.

“I see.... So, as a newcomer, I will follow quietly. After all, I am part of the plan.”

“Don’t disappoint me, Petos-kun.”

“You too, Fenrir-sama. If you fail to free the right arm, the ruins will fall into the hands of Shadow Garden...”

Petos stopped speaking and braced himself.

Terrible magic overflowed from Fenrir.

“Who are you talking to, Petos? I am Fenrir. I have long occupied the fifth seat of Rounds. I am proud of it. I will definitely free Diabolos’ right arm.”

“...That is the reason why you are called Fenrir-sama.”

“We will revive the demon Diabolos and gain eternal life. For that, I will not stop no matter what. Even if this country collapses...”

“...Results are everything. I came here to help Fenrir-sama.”

“I told you. I don’t need your help.”

“This is the decision of the Round Table. Please, use this artifact.”

It was a bad necklace with clock-like hands.

“...What is this?”

“It’s the latest artifact developed in the cult’s laboratory. I think it will be useful.”

“...I’ll use it when I feel like it. Still, I didn’t think you would come all the way here just to run errands. I wonder what’s gotten into you.”

“I’m just following orders. I am a man loyal to the cult. I heard that a golden beastkin visited these ruins.”

Petos asked that casually, as if they were making small talk.

But Fenrir sensed something in his tone of voice and knew that was the main problem.

“Golden beastkin, huh? I wonder...”

Of course, those Seven Shadows were still in Fenrir’s memory.

But he had no intention of saying it properly.
Fenrir’s gaze crossed with Petos.

“If you find her, let me know.”

Petos was the first to look away.

“Is there anything about that beastkin?”

“No, nothing worth telling. I’ll be excused.”

And with that, he disappeared into the mist quickly.

“The golden beastkin... Petos wiped out the golden panther group and obtained a sample. It was the foothold for promotion to Rounds. There can’t be... any survivors of the golden panther group?”

He saw a cylindrical device with about sixty percent of magic energy stored in it. He didn’t care either way, so he took it for granted.

“This is getting interesting.”

Fenrir smiled through his fangs.

* * *

The kingdom of Oriana, which was destroyed by the Black Rose, was being rebuilt quickly with the help of Shadow Garden.

Alpha squinted as she watched the sunset from the royal palace.

“So... have you made up your mind?”

She asked the girl behind her.

There was a beautiful girl there with honey-colored hair. Rose Oriana.

“Will I be forgiven?”

Rose said with a trembling look.

“You won’t be forgiven. Many people still hate you.”

“Just as I thought... I can’t just become queen. It will only bring chaos to the country.”

“In times of peace, that may be true. But not now. If you look at what will happen to this country now, you will see that there is no other choice.”

Alpha turned around and gave Rose a sharp look.

“You know very well the alliance between the Midgar Kingdom and the Oriana Kingdom has been broken. The Holy Church officially sees the Oriana Kingdom as a heretical land. Trade in the Oriana Kingdom will be severely restricted and will soon come to an end. Sooner or later, many neighboring countries will be ordered to conquer the Oriana Kingdom. I don’t know how many lands will mobilize, but a land without proper power can’t do anything. It will be total destruction.”

“Heretical lands... How can this be?”

Rose clenched her fists and bowed her head.

“The cult is afraid of this country...”

“Why would they fear such a small country?”

“They are like frightened sheep, who are afraid of the sunlight.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Eternal life is a symbol of human desire. Those who obtain it fear it being taken from them more than anything else. If they rule the world, there will always be those who try to take it from them. That is why they hide. They choose to keep eternal life a secret so that it will never be taken from them, and use the Holy Church to rule the world from behind the scenes. That is why they fear the sunlight.”

“Frightened sheep....”

“But the enmity between the Oriana Kingdom and the Diabolos Cult has connected the two sides of the world. If they let the Oriana Kingdom run free, the Diabolos Cult will eventually be dragged out onto the stage. They are afraid of that.”

“....Shadow Garden will use that, won’t they?”
Rose gave Alpha a stern look.

“That’s right. We’re going to use the Oriana Kingdom. That’s why I’m lending you a hand.”

“With Shadow Garden’s power, we should be able to defeat the Cult. Why use the Oriana Kingdom...?”

“It won’t annihilate the Diabolos Cult.”

“....Eh?”

“People will die. The country will be destroyed. However, religion will never perish. Even if we defeat the Diabolos Cult, it will not end. That is religion. As long as there are people who believe in it, it will last forever.”

“No way...”

“Don’t underestimate the Cult. If you make the Cult your enemy, you will be eliminated by the people. Most of them are citizens of good lands, including believers in the Holy Church and even priests. The Cult will use the Holy Church to incite the people and come to kill you. No matter how powerful Shadow Garden is, it won’t be able to kill all the cults in the world. That’s why the Oriana Kingdom needs us. You need us to drag the evil creature known as the Diabolos Cult into the limelight and break the connection between the Holy Church and the Diabolos Cult.”

“How will you sever their ties?”

“I will make the Holy Church abandon the Cult. What the people believe in is the Holy teachings, not the Diabolos Cult. By making that clear, the Diabolos Cult will become the common enemy of the world. For that, we must win. The neighboring nations will eventually come to conquer the Oriana Kingdom. There, we will be victorious. Win, and declare to the world that the enemy of the world is the Diabolos Cult.”

“So that’s why you told me to become queen?”

“To destroy the Cult, we need a nation that stands in our place. The fight between the Oriana Kingdom and the Holy Church is an intermediary war between Shadow Garden and the Diabolos Cult. If you are ready to become queen, we will support you from the shadows.”

“.... Am I going to be a great queen?”

Rose bowed her head and let out the words.

“You are not a ruler in times of peace, but a ruler in times of need. What a queen needs in peacetime is goodness to be admired by the people and enrich the country. But the situation is different. What the people need in times of strife is strength. The power to bring pain, sacrifice, and be hated by the people, all while achieving your goals.”

Alpha looked at Rose with those beautiful eyes.

“Rose Oriana, you must become a strong ruler.”

“A strong ruler...”

Rose swallowed the words.

Instead of saying them out loud, she repeated them in her mind. And what came to mind was her own weakness.

“I’m weak...”

“Only those who know how weak they are can become stronger.”

A single tear rolled down Rose’s cheek.

“If there’s anything I can do for the Oriana Kingdom and the people Father left behind... I want to protect this country, no matter how much they hate me. I...”

Rose wiped away her tears and looked up.

She then drew her thin sword and ran it through her long honey-colored hair.

“I... don’t want this to end with me being weak.”

Saying that, she drew her thin sword.

Her cut honey-colored hair danced in the wind.

“I will be a strong ruler.”

Rose’s hair had become shoulder-length.

“As long as you are determined to do so, I swear that Shadow Garden will never betray you.”

Alpha smiled softly.

Then she summoned No.664 and No.665. For some reason, they were both wearing maid uniforms.

“I’ll put them both by your side. It’s better to be surrounded by familiar faces.”

“Thank you very much.”

“There is no need to be formal. You and I are the same. You will be a strong queen, won’t you?”

“Yes. Ah, yes, I will be a strong queen.”

Rose spoke as if she was not used to it.

“Hehe... No.666 is so cute.”

“Well, that’s okay, isn’t it? If you talk to me about it, it’ll get done faster.”

No.665 and No.664 said that in low voices.

“Thank you, you two.”

“You’re welcome.”

“I-I’m the squad leader, so don’t forget that.”

“I know, Leader.”

Rose gave them a gentle smile.

“We will inform you of our plans from now on through No.664 and No.665, so prepare a list of families and positions in advance. It is best to keep the relationship between Shadow Garden and the Oriana Kingdom a secret for now.”

“I will hire you two as my personal servants. The family list is up to you.”

“That’s fine... There seems to be someone here.”

Just then, the door to the room opened and an indigo red-haired elven girl entered.

It was the third seat Gamma from Seven Shadows.

For some reason, Gamma was dragging a girl.

“Alpha-sama, are you here?”

“Oh, Gamma came to the Oriana Kingdom too.”

“Considering the future, we have closed the Mitsugoshi Company within the Oriana Kingdom. Instead, we are preparing to expand our headquarters in Shadow Garden.”

Gamma lowered her voice slightly as she spoke.

“That’s Gamma. I’m glad you’re working so fast.”

“What about Princess Rose?”

Gamma glanced at Rose from the side.

“She has already decided to cooperate with us.”

Alpha said, looking at Rose as well.

“I look forward to working with you.”

Gamma responded to Rose’s greeting with a silent bow of her head

“Alpha-sama. I have two things to report. May I talk to you here?”

Gamma seemed concerned about Rose’s presence here.

Rose suspected that she still did not trust her.

“I can prepare another room for you two.”

“I don’t mind.”

That was Alpha’s reply, interrupting Rose.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I don’t mind.”

Saying that, Alpha looked at Gamma and Rose.

I don’t mind. What are you guys going to do?

That was what Alpha was asking.

“...I don’t mind either.”

"Me too."

Gamma and Rose replied.

"First, about the equipment Beta found in the Demon World a few days ago."

"You mean the laptop and tablet?"

"I told Eta to investigate everything. Eta, explain."

With that, Gamma called out to the girl she was dragging.

"Zzzz."

A cute sleepy breath came out of the girl.

"Hey, Eta, wake up!"

Gamma held Eta's shoulders and shook her with all her might.

Eta's head swayed back and forth, hitting Gamma's nose.

"Hyaah!"

The shaking woke Eta up.

"Mwah?"

It was Eta. She was the seventh seat of the Seven Shadows, mainly specializing in researching the Shadow's wisdom.

"...Where am I?"

Eta casually looked around.

She was an elf of small stature.

Her long, dark hair was currently a mess.

“H-Hurry, report the incident to Alpha-sama!”

Gamma spoke while holding her nosegay.

“Report...? Oh, about Laptop-chan.”

“T-That’s right.”

“Umm, report.”

Eta sleepily looked at Alpha.

“The laptop and everything that uses electricity is broken. I’ve taken it apart and checked, but it’s probably the electromagnetic waves from when they passed through the gate.”

“Do you think you can fix it?”

“Not right now. But we’ll figure it out eventually.”

“So.... I don’t think anyone can fix it. Let’s just wait patiently. Beta always carries things with electricity.”

“That’s not true. The techniques used are very high. Even if you can’t operate it, you can learn many different techniques.”

“Really? In that case, it’s okay. But Beta is depressed, isn’t she?”

“She’s crying.”

“Is there something that makes her cry?”

“No, no. She was depressed, so I mixed some medicine into her tea to make her feel better.”

“....And?”

“She suddenly took off her clothes and started crying. I don’t know why, but it was interesting.”

The corners of Eta’s lips curled into a smirk.

Alpha let out a long breath.

“...Next month’s research expenses will be greatly reduced.”

“Eh? Why!?”

“I told you not to conduct human experiments without permission. Reflect on your actions.”

“Eeeh? Even though there are sacrifices for the development of shadow wisdom.”

“Don’t just ‘eh’. Also, if you find any technology that might be useful in that world, report back to me.”

“Eeeeeh?”

“There’s one more thing you brought back, right?”

Alpha’s eyes narrowed.

“That thing... Ah. That other person woke up earlier. I didn’t understand her language, so she’s talking to Beta right now. Her name is Akane.”

“Akane... did you learn anything else?”

“I think her body is almost the same as a human’s. But I don’t know the details yet. If it’s okay to do experiments on humans, I’ll find out soon.”

“Just leave it to Beta until things calm down. Don’t do anything strange.”

“Eeeeeh?”

Eta nodded reluctantly.

“I understand what happened to Eta. So, what’s your second report?”

Alpha spoke to Gamma.

"The second one is about Zeta in the Midgar Kingdom. Have you received a report from Zeta?"

"Not yet. Honestly... That girl didn't report to me at all."

Alpha sighed again.

"I checked on her before coming to the Oriana Kingdom, so I will report to you."

"You're a lifesaver, Gamma."

"The Fenrir faction is on the move. It looks like they kidnapped students from Midgar Academy. We've found most of them demon-possessed, so they're having trouble breaking the seal."

"So, what about Zeta?"

"Well... she hasn't moved."

"She hasn't moved?"

"Yes, I'm sure she's already understood the movements of the Fenrir faction."

"She acts a lot on her own, but she's definitely got the upper hand. I wonder if there's something going on."

Alpha sounded a little confused.

"Fenrir's faction may have declined, but they have ruled the underworld of the Midgar Kingdom for a long time. And Fenrir is one of the former Rounds. We can't underestimate it."

"The collapse of trust should have done enough damage to the Fenrir faction. I didn't expect there to be much power or funds left, but... I wonder if it's the power of the former Rounds."

"Maybe we should send someone to help them. Delta is in the Midgar Kingdom, but I don't think the two of them will be able to work together."

"You're right..."

Alpha said vaguely, staring at the scenery outside.

“I’m busy preparing the base, and Eta is busy with her research. Beta has to deal with girls from other worlds and take care of paperwork, so... Epsilon is the one who is free. There are some other numbers too...”

“No need.”

Alpha said, still staring into the distance.

“But... will she be okay?”

“Don’t worry. I’m sure she’ll be fine. She’s always like that.”

Gamma thought that was an uncharacteristically optimistic idea from Alpha.

“I have a bad feeling about this.”

“....I still remember the first day I met her. I had never seen her face so sad, as if she hated everything in this world. I welcomed Zeta as family so that her emotional wounds could heal... She has changed.”

Alpha turned and looked at Gamma with her blue eyes.

“So don’t worry... We are family.”

Alpha smiled. A gentle, all-encompassing smile.

I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
and hoped to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood,
"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence in Shadow

I can't remember the moment anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow"
ever since I could remember.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene,
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more

The Eminence in Shadow
Volume Five
Chapter Five

An Unexpected Terrorists Attack in the Academy Again!!!

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An Unexpected Terrorists Attack in the Academy Again!!!

Alexia looked up at the Midgar Academy building at sunset.

The students walked past Alexia when class was over.

“The Knights Order cannot be trusted. Sister too...”

She recalled her conversation with Iris a few days ago.

Her sister had changed, and Alexia’s words... none of them... had reached her.

“I have to do something...”

The cult was trying to resurrect Diabolos’ right arm somewhere in this school.

If she could not trust anyone, she would have to do it on her own. If she could stop the resurrection of the right arm and get solid evidence, everyone would believe her.

“Hey, you’re in the way.”

“Ouch.”

Suddenly, Alexia was pushed from behind with tremendous force and turned around.

Under the setting sun, a beautiful girl with black hair crossed her arms.

“Claire...”

“If you stand there like that, you’ll get in the way of my journey.”

“J-Journey?”

She did not understand.

Claire looked at Alexia with eyes full of mysterious confidence.

“You seem so stuck. What is it, Alexia?”

“I’m... thinking about the future.”

“What a coincidence, me too.”

“Claire too?”

“Yes. Even if the truth is buried, it doesn’t end there. We need someone to solve the case behind the scenes.”

“...?”

“And I don’t know whether to tell Alexia this or not... But I’m the chosen one.”

Claire raised her magic-engraved right hand.

“It is my mission to save the world and protect Cid. That is why I was given this power.”

“Huh...?”

“If we have the same goal, I am willing to cooperate with you. Let’s go.”

“W-Wait!”

Without knowing what was going on, Alexia was pulled by Claire’s arm.

But it was strangely unobtrusive.

“Where are you going!?”

“The church.”

“Do you know where it is!?”

“I know... my right hand is throbbing.”

Claire paused, looking serious.

“Aurora didn’t say anything, but I know. She was hiding something. And she led me to the truth...”

Claire said this and opened the bandage on her right arm.

The magic circle engraved there shone slightly.

“It’s a bit suspicious...”

“Little by little it’s getting stronger... means that the moment is coming.”

And then the magic circle shone brighter.

“...It’s coming!”

The next moment, the world cracked and shattered like glass.

“Eh? No way!”

Alexia recalled this moment. It was the same as what she saw when she was captured by the head librarian.

And then a white mist enveloped the school.

“Wh-What is this!?”

“Why is there fog in the school...?”

The students who were on their way home were also caught in the fog, and the fog enveloped the school.

* * *

I was standing on the rooftop, looking down at Midgar Academy as the sun set.

“I don’t care. If that’s what the world needs... I will be hated by the world. That is my mission...”

I muttered a reworked version of Zeta’s words last night, and felt a tremor in my heart.

“...This kind of development might work.”

Shadow, a man who rebelled against the world.

He endured his own crimes to protect the world... How cool.

“Zeta did it too. They really organized it to be like this....”

I’ll pay homage to her here.

No, wait. Come to think of it, I must have said the same sentence a long time ago.

“Of course we’re not on the path of righteousness, but we’re not on the path of evil either. We’re just following our own path...”

I stood on the edge of the roof and struck a cool pose.

Then let the wind blow my uniform away.

“If you can, bring us all the sins of the world. We’ll bear them all...”

It was still cool.

It was definitely a line I’d said. It also sounded good on the rooftop at sunset.

“Chronologically, I was the first. There’s no harm in dabbling. It’s more like they plagiarized it.”

So, if there was a chance, I would definitely use it.

But it was also a good opportunity.

Lately, I had been neglecting my training around dialog, so it was good to go back to square one for the first time in a while.

“Darkness.... engulfed the world.”

“The wind is blowing hard... It’s the scream of the soul”

I said that and alternated between cool poses.

In my previous life, I used to do secret training sessions like this on the rooftop. It brought back good memories.

“The school building colored by the setting sun... only one person on the roof... He looked down at the students leaving the school and smiled meaningfully... He felt something was going to happen...”

This whole situation was perfect.

I raised my right hand and showed off.

“...Something is coming.”

The next moment, the world shattered into pieces.

And then a white mist started rolling in.

“...Eh?”

As if separating the school from the outside world, the white mist enveloped the school.

The fog quickly thickened and before long, not even the setting sun could be seen.

“...”

I blinked repeatedly and looked around.

“...Eh? Eh? Ehh?”

I did feel that something was going to happen, but I didn’t expect anything to actually happen.

Confused voices could be heard from the schoolyard.

“Wh-What’s going on!?”

“W-We have to report to the teacher!”

“The teacher is outside in a staff meeting, no one is around!”

The students who were still in school began to gather.

“Fumu... The mysterious white mist... The isolated school... And I’m smiling on the roof... This is good too.”

I’m not sure of the details, but this is definitely a sign of the start of an event.

“The white mist... will soon envelop the world in silence.”

I dazzled my eyes meaningfully and walked away from the roof.

When I went down the stairs and out into the corridor of the school building, the light was dimly lit by the thick fog.

More than half of the students seemed to have left the school.

“What is this fog?”

I thought the head librarian had used some kind of artifact, but he was gone.

I tried to explore the fog with my magic, but all I could confirm was some kind of strange mist.

“...Whatever.”

After all, having fun in the mist was more important to me than the mist itself.

Should I join the other students for now? Or should I suddenly appear as Shadow?

“What should I do!?”

I jumped nimbly down the corridor. At that moment, I heard a scream from the distance.

“There’s an impromptu event, isn’t there?”

I jumped at super speed in the direction of the scream.

* * *

“Pretty sure I heard it coming around here...”

A number of doors lined up in rows, narrowly spaced. This was a private study room.

All the rooms were empty, probably because it was close to dismissal time, but there was only one locked door and voices could be heard from inside.

“Hhmm!”

I broke the doorknob and quietly walked into the room.

“Wh-What’s going on!?”

There was a male student in the room.

He was holding his neck and groaning. I recognized his face.

“You’re my classmate, I guess... Um... Suzuki-kun, right?”

Yes, he was a student so mysterious that he was my equal. I respected his shadowy figure and had used him as a reference on several occasions.

According to my mob list, he was a distant relative of Christina, a branch family of Duke Hope.

“Y-You Kagenou-kun! Help me, I can’t get the necklace off my neck!!!”

“Necklace...?”

A very strange necklace was attached to Suzuki-kun’s neck. It didn’t fit a typical mob.

“It’s really strange. It’s not just like you.”

“This necklace is attached by itself! I can’t get it off, and it’s been making strange noises from before...”

I could hear a small sound... beep, beep, beep.

There were numbers on the necklace and when I looked at them, the time was exactly zero.

Then, there was a long beep.

“Ah.”

“Ah...!”

And then Suzuki-kun’s head exploded.

Blood splattered all over the room and I guarded myself with slime to avoid getting splattered.

Suzuki-kun’s head rolled on the floor and my eyes met his hateful eyes.

“...I had a feeling it would explode anyway.”

A little too late.

I prayed, clapping my hands together.

“Now... What is this necklace?”

I picked up Suzuki-kun’s necklace.

The collar, which was really strange, was burnt black. The timer had stopped pointing to zero.

“Hmm...”

I examined the necklace, flowing magic power into it.

I also used my knowledge of my previous life to develop a very sophisticated and precise theory.

The result...

“This is a necklace-shaped bomb that explodes when the timer reaches zero!”

I developed my explanation further.

“Mhm, Mhm... Normally the timer decreases over time, but this one seems to be different. The numbers go up and down according to the magic power. When I touched the necklace, it felt as if the magic power was being sucked out of me. So this means... When I wear the necklace, it will suck out the magic power strongly, and when it reaches zero, it will become an exploding bomb!”

Suzuki-kun had low magic power in class. He practiced his magic in the study room and was unlucky enough to get caught up in the current incident when his magic power ran low and he exploded to death.

“...There is always one truth.”

I smiled at his.

The question was when and where the necklace was worn.

“If someone puts a necklace like this on me, I will usually notice it right away. Anyone who doesn’t notice is a fool...”

I had a bad feeling and touched my neck.

A necklace was attached.

What? Since when...?

“...It must have been put on in a very sophisticated way that a normal person wouldn’t notice.”

Can you imagine, was the necklace installed when the white mist appeared?

I made a mirror out of slime and observed the necklace on my neck.

It was definitely the same necklace as Suzuki-kun’s.

The timer for the remaining magic power was broken, reaching 9999. There was a feeling of magic being sucked out little by little, but it was very small compared to the total amount, and the amount of natural recovery was much greater.

“Hmm...”

To be honest, I could try to release it in any way I wanted, but of course I rejected that idea.

There was no other choice but to participate in the ‘Bomb Necklace Event’.

For the time being, I broke the magic circuit in my body and adjusted the remaining magic power.

“Suzuki-kun lacks magic, so... Okay, I guess this is enough.”

I adjusted my magic power so that the number was around 600.

I was losing magic power every ten seconds.

The rest of my life was probably one hour and forty minutes.

The reason why I took the trouble to adjust the amount of magic power like Suzuki-kun’s was, of course, because...

“...A shadow lord disguised as an ordinary deceased student and conducted an investigation. Fufufu, cool.”

For some reason, Suzuki-kun, a lame student, started muttering meaningful words after that incident.

And when his hidden abilities are revealed and he manages to find the real culprit of the incident, he reveals his true identity...!

I’m getting excited.

“With the slime makeup technique that comes from Nu and the slime plastic surgery ability that comes from Epsilon... become like this.”

When I looked in the mirror, it was Suzuki-kun who was there, no matter where you looked.

Just in case, I also brought his textbook and other small items, and I was ready to go.

“Alright, let’s go!”

I left the study room with an even faster leap than when I came.

◆

Alexia and Claire gathered in the auditorium to discuss this matter.

“There is no doubt about it. This necklace absorbs magic. When the number reaches zero...”

Alexia’s gaze fell on the body of a student who had died from an explosion in the neck.

Getting rid of it was also dangerous.

Claire tried several times to check by flowing magic power into the necklace. But always, she felt a painful resistance.

The necklace could explode if provoked.

“Anyway, don’t waste your magic power. Be vigilant, especially if you have very little magic left.”

Alexia shouted at the students.

The students trapped in the white mist gathered in the auditorium. Many students should have already left the school, but the number of students coming to the auditorium was still increasing.

Around their necks were still strange necklaces.

Alexia’s necklace pointed to 1303 and Claire’s to 1917.

“Huff... I’ve looked around, but I don’t see any reliable teachers.”

Said Nina, a small girl student in a short skirt.

“Right. Looks like we’ll just have to try on our own.”

“Nina, is Cid here?”

“lil’ bro isn’t here. I think he went back to the dormitory.”

“Thank God...”

Claire breathed a sigh of relief.

“Then, what exactly happened? The mysterious white mist, the strange necklace. No contact with the outside world. I have no idea what’s going on.”

“...Shadow Garden.”

A male student with dark green hair muttered that.

“The case of the missing students and the mysterious death of the head librarian. There are rumors about an organization called Shadow Garden being involved. My father worked for the Knights Order, so I’ve heard all sorts of stories.”

“You’re Isaac-kun, right? I heard you’re a promising swordsman. But do you have any proof that Shadow Garden is behind this?”

“Proof? Princess Alexia, you’re asking strange questions. They have a criminal record for trying to take over the school, don’t they?”

“...Do they have a motive?”

“They are a ruthless criminal organization. They have no motive. They kill people for fun and to satisfy their desires.”

The students around them, who were listening to the conversation, were annoyed.

“S-Shadow Garden again...”

“I... almost got killed in that incident... *sob*.”

“What do they want!? ...Why are they doing this to us!?”

“Everyone calm down! Isaac-kun, you should refrain from saying anything that causes concern.”

“I’m sorry.”

Isaac froze. But the students’ worries remained.

“Don’t blindly assume the culprit with so little information. All we have to do is take off this necklace and get out. Am I wrong?”

“But it looks like it won’t be easy.”

Nina said so.

“I tried to figure out where this fog was leading, but I couldn’t get out of the schoolyard. There’s some kind of invisible barrier.”

“In that case, is there any way to remove the collar...”

“That would be difficult. It seems to be a very complicated artifact. We’ll never know what might happen if we touch it.”

“That’s right...”

A deep silence spread throughout the auditorium.

“No... I, I don’t want to die yet!”

A trembling male student near the wall got up and started running.

“Me too!!! I won’t die here... I won’t die!!!”

A few more people followed him towards the exit of the auditorium.

“H-Hey, wait a minute!”

Alexia shouted hurriedly.

But as they stepped out of the auditorium, there was a spray of blood.

“Wha-!”

A translucent sword had pierced through the students.

The sword was wielded by a lifeless spirit warrior.

“That’s a... spirit!”

“What is that spirit doing here!?”

“I don’t know, but Aurora said it’s a spirit!”

Claire and Alexia drew their swords and ran.
Isaac and Nina followed.

“Haah!”

“Take this!”

Alexia and Claire’s flash swings caused several spirits to vanish.

But outside the auditorium, a large number of spirits were still wandering around.

“There have been this many... since when!?”

“That’s a lot. It’s going to drain my strength.”

“You two, be careful with your remaining magic power.”

Nina’s suggestion came from behind.

The two checked each other’s necklaces as if in panic.

“Let’s do it!”

“Close the auditorium doors!”

Nina and Isaac closed the door while Alexia and Claire repelled the spirit.

“You two, hurry!”

Just as the door was about to close, they rushed into the auditorium.

While catching their breath, they checked their necklaces. Alexia’s was 1238 and Claire’s was 1825.

“This is bad... At this rate, the numbers will drop faster than I expected.”

“Right. How much do you have left, Nina?”

“Eh? Mine...”

For some reason, Nina was trying to hide the numbers.

“If you look at me like that, you can’t see it.”

“Ah, yes. That’s right.”

Nina slowly pointed them out. The numbers were very natural.

“784. That’s less than I thought.”

“At this rate, I only have about two hours to live. As for Isaac-kun...”

“I’m 1367.”

“As expected of an outstanding student. You also have the best magic power in your class. Shall we check everyone’s remaining magic power?”

Alexia and the others checked the remaining magic power of the students in the auditorium.

“It’s at least in the 300s...”

After checking, Alexia lowered her voice and said.

“It looks like she spent a lot of magic during her mandatory extracurricular training. If we don’t do something in less than an hour, she’ll die...”

In front of Claire’s gaze was a female student who had turned pale and was trembling.

“There are many students who have very little magic left. I also don’t know how long we can survive in this place.”

The doors of the auditorium were banged on by the spirits. The students piled up chairs and tables to form a barricade.

“What should we do now, Princess Alexia?”

Isaac asked Alexia.

“Although you ask, I don’t know...”

She wasn’t supposed to be trapped in the white mist, and there was no way she could figure out how to remove the necklace.

Alexia’s gaze wandered as if searching for answers.

Then.

“If it continues like this, we will only wait for death...”

His voice was not loud.

But strangely, that voice had a power that echoed throughout the auditorium.

“...I have an idea.”

A male student was leaning against the wall of the auditorium. His dark brown hair was slicked back and slowly stepped in front of Alexia and the others.

“You are...?”

“I’m Suzuki.”

He looked directly at Alexia. He had a slightly bad look in his eyes, but he was an ordinary student who could be anywhere.

“...He’s in the same class as me.”

Isaac added.

“So you’re Suzuki-kun. You said you had an idea. Can you tell me about it?”

“Right...”

Suzuki spoke slowly, looking around at the students in the auditorium.

“First, our power is limited. Many of the students here have very little magic left, and if we engage in combat, we will be quickly drained. If we fight, we will literally be fighting for our lives. The mental burden is also great. I don’t think they can fight well.”

“...I agree.”

It was a precise analysis.

Calmly, he analyzed the situation under these tense circumstances.

“There are only a few people here who possess great magic power. In other words, there are only 28 people who can be used as a fighting force. So we divided the students into two squads.”

He then looked at the students who were protecting themselves as he said that.

“The second unit is the defense squad. The students with low remaining magic power remain in the auditorium, conserving their magic power and defending themselves. And there is another unit...”

Suzuki looked around at Alexia and the others.

“The suicide squad...”

“...Hey, what did you say!?”

At that moment, a female student’s voice interrupted Suzuki’s statement.

The tension of Alexia and the others, who had been listening to the conversation under their breath, disappeared.

“Don’t talk carelessly to Princess Alexia even if you are part of the branch family. You should be there protecting yourself. If you do something unnecessary and damage the reputation of the main family, you will be held accountable.”

Behind her stood a beautiful girl with bright red hair.

“Umm, if I’m not mistaken you are...”

“I’m Christina Hope. I’m Suzuki’s distant relative.”

“...She’s my classmate. She’s very nice.”

Isaac added.

“Looks like Suzuki has been giving you guys trouble... He’s usually quiet.”

Cristina grabbed Suzuki’s uniform and tried to take him away.

It was Alexia who stopped her.

“Wait. He has a point.”

Cristina reluctantly let Suzuki go.

“Ouch. Christina-neesan is still the same as always.”

“You dare talk to me like that.”

“We are now in an emergency situation. I have to be a little reckless.”

“What do you mean?”

Seeing Christina’s sharp gaze, Suzuki let out a small sigh.

“Let’s get back to the original topic. We will form a suicide squad of a few elites who have enough magic power left. Then we’ll break through the spirit defenses and cut off the source of this phenomenon....That’s my plan.”

“What is the source of this phenomenon?”

“Our magic is being absorbed by this necklace. Where is the magic going? Didn’t you guys think of that?”

“That...”

Alexia concentrated and detected magic power.

Then, she felt a small amount of magic power flowing out from the necklace.

“If we trace this magic power... I don’t think you realize it.”

“Suzuki, you...”

Christina was also a little surprised.

“This is a simple conclusion. Anyone with a little thought can figure it out.”

He said so casually.

“Indeed, this is amazing. But can we accurately trace the magic power?”

Isaac said.

“Thin magic is easily disrupted. I’m against Suzuki-kun’s plan. He’s not even a good student. No, frankly speaking, he’s a lower student than that.”

He looked at Suzuki with eyes full of suspicion.

“Right.”

Christina nodded.

“Let’s be honest. Suzuki is not worth trusting.”

Isaac turned his stern gaze on Suzuki.

All eyes were on Suzuki.

“Believe it huh...? Heh.”

Suzuki chuckled.

“...What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. It’s just that, well... I didn’t expect the most untrustworthy person to say that to me.”

“What do you mean...!?”

In the midst of all this, it was Claire who opened her mouth.

“I agree with Suzuki’s plan.”

“Claire...?”

“My right hand is pulsing... where the magic power flows. So I can feel it, I can’t make a mistake... I can trace the magic.”

Claire turned her eyes strong.

“Claire... Alright, I understand. Let’s execute Suzuki’s plan.”

Alexia said.

“Wait a minute! I don’t trust him.”

“We’re running out of time. We can’t keep having strategy meetings.”

“But...”

“Isaac-kun, we’ll go alone, even if you don’t agree.”

“I guess I agree to Suzuki’s plan, too.”

When Nina also raised her hand, Isaac gave up.

“Kuh... I understand, I agree.”

“Let’s decide on the suicide squad unit. Starting from, Claire, Isaac and me. Is everything okay so far?”

Claire and Isaac nodded at Alexia’s question.

“And, if you can, I’d like you to help too, Christina-san.”

Cristina’s remaining magic power was 1179.

“If Princess Alexia requests it. I will help.”

“Thank you. For now, the four of us...”

“I’m coming with you.”

Nina raised her hand.

“But you don’t have enough magic left...”

Alexia looked agitated.

Nina had 784 magic power left, that was absolutely not a number she could waste.

“Nina will be fine. Her magic power is normal, but she’s quite reliable.”

“...Well, please cooperate, Nina-senpai.”

“I’ll do my best not to get in the way.”

“Besides, wasn’t it 784 before?”

“Eh? What?”

For a moment, Nina’s expression froze.

“Nina’s remaining magic power. I feel like it hasn’t decreased since earlier.”

“You think so? It was 794, so I lost 10.”

“Really?”

“That’s right. Claire just forgot.”

After saying that, Nina carefully stroked the necklace around her neck with her finger.

Then the number decreased by one.

“Ah, it’s 783 now.”

“See? You can see it’s going down.”

“Fuuh. I thought there was a way to keep the magic up.”

“There’s no way there is.”

Nina let out a disappointed sigh.

“In that case, the five of us will act as a suicide squad...”

“...I’ll go too.”

It was Suzuki who said that.

“Of course it’s impossible. You only have 541 magic power left.”

“You’ll only slow us down.”

Christina and Isaac disagreed.

“If I’m going to be a burden, just leave me. I won’t ask for help.”

Suzuki said flatly.

“I agree. If he becomes a hindrance, we should leave him and use him as bait.”

Nina interrupted Alexia and said.

"Hey, that's inappropriate."

Claire relented.

"She said it was fine. Besides, her analytical skills could come in handy."

"...Well, let's bring her along."

Surprisingly, it was Christina who continued.

"If he slows down, I'll take responsibility as the head of the family. That's fine, isn't it?"

Christina turned her stern gaze on Suzuki.

"...No problem."

He nodded slowly.

* * *

Alexia took the lead in explaining the strategy to everyone.

Some students protested, "You're leaving us!?" but there was no time to convince them.

The six of them exited the back door of the auditorium unnoticed. Claire and Alexia quickly dealt with any spirits that might be in the way and hurried on their way.

Meanwhile, Cristina observed Suzuki silently without being noticed.

He calmly stood in the white mist facing the spirits that could attack from anywhere.

"...Something is strange."

Christina muttered in a voice so small that no one could hear her.

Her relationship with Suzuki was as a distant relative and classmate. Nothing more, nothing less, and they did not have such a deep relationship.

Even so, she knew what kind of person Suzuki was.

He was not the kind of person who could act haughty in front of Princess Alexia or stand calmly in a real fight.

He was like a different person... He had changed so much that she could do nothing but describe him as such.

However, Suzuki's face and voice were his own.

"...I heard he's hiding his abilities."

It was all to avoid getting involved in the dispute between the main family and the branch family. The motive was thin, but not impossible.

"...Effects of artifacts or drugs."

That was the only other thing she could think of, but it still did not fit.

Yet there was no doubt that something had changed in him.

If Suzuki endangered the main family, Christina would not hesitate to get rid of him.

Christina thought so... Then.

"Watch out for danger."

Gently, Christina's shoulder was pulled.

Right after that, the spirit sword almost slashed Christina.

"You bastard!"

She reacted as expected and cleaved the spirit with her sword.

The spirit shattered and vanished.

"That was great, Christina-neesan."

"...You saved me."

She said that to Suzuki. If he had not been there, he would have been slashed.

“As part of the branch family, I only did what I had to do.”

He said without hesitation and hurried away. She could not read anything from behind his back.

* * *

“This way.”

Claire followed the thin magic and walked through the school building. She occasionally held the bandage on her right hand and seemed to be worried about something.

“What’s wrong with her right hand?”

“Something strange and it can sense magic.”

Alexia gave Isaac a reasonable answer, there was no way she would answer that her body was possessed by an incomprehensible spirit like Aurora.

“Is that the secret to winning the Bushin Festival?”

“Something like that, I guess.”

“The fog is getting thicker. We never know where we might be surprised by an attack.”

“You’re right.”

“But don’t worry. I will take care of Princess Alexia’s safety...”

At that moment, Alexia suddenly drew her sword.

She then slashed at the spirit’s arm, which had grown out from under her foot. Together with the crushed spirit at her side, Alexia lowered her sword.

“...Did you just say something?”

"No... Nothing."

The six of them continued in silence for a while.

"Did you hear that?"

It was Nina who stopped and said.

"What is this... a scream!?"

Alexia and the others, straining their ears, were sure they heard the scream.

"There might be students who haven't escaped yet. What should we do?"

Claire, who was leading the way, looked back.

"But we don't have much time left either."

Isaac suggested. As he said, from the moment they left the auditorium to this point, they had used up almost 20% of their magic.

"...Let's save them."

Alexia made her decision after hesitating.

They all ran through the school building and found countless spirits wandering at the end of the corridor.

"These spirits... Are they surrounding the classroom?"

"It looks like there are students inside!"

Claire shouted.

"Not only inside, outside as well."

Nina found countless corpses, cruelly torn apart.

And then there were students about to be slashed.

"Hiiiih! ....H-Help me!!!"

...Won't make it in time.

Everyone thought so.

But the blood-red tentacles reached out. The tentacles tore apart the spirits around the female student and saved her.

"Now...!"

As soon as Claire gave the order, the six of them lunged into the horde of spirits.

Claire moved her red tentacles to create an opening in the spirit horde, Alexia slashed at them one after another with her agile movements, and Isaac crushed them with his powerful sword filled with magic power.

These three are the mainstays of the battle.

Nina, Christina and Suzuki fought not much behind the main force.

Nina faced the spirits that Claire had missed, while Christina fought by glancing at Suzuki from the side.

And Suzuki... just stood there.

He didn't even draw his sword.

Leaning against the corridor wall and watching the fight from the sidelines. His appearance was very unfamiliar.

The spirits were ferociously obliterated by the five people's attacks.

When the fight was over, Christina was the first to open her mouth.

"If you don't want to fight, you'll just get in the way."

"I just avoided a useless fight because my remaining magic power is low. You don't even look in trouble without me... Or don't tell me you need help?"

“No need. Just stay behind and tremble.”

“That’s soothing.”

The two exchanged a few words with mutual indifference.

The distance between them felt greater than classmates or relatives.

“Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

Claire looked at the female student she had saved.

“M-My arm...”

The girl’s face contorted.

“Broken bone, you need to rest...”

Claire took a quick look at the remaining magic power of the girl. It was already below 100.

“It’s not safe here. Let’s go inside the classroom.”

Alexia tried to open the classroom door.

“W-Wait! Help me, if I go back to class, I’ll...!”

The schoolgirl shouted desperately.

At that moment, the classroom door opened behind her.

“My, my, it’s Princess Alexia. Please come in.”

“You’re... the student council vice president.”

There was a beautiful student... Eliza, the student council vice president.

* * *

“Good, you’ll be fine now.”

Eliza took care of the injured female student with a gentle smile.

“T-Thank you very much... Eliza-sama...”

The schoolgirl’s voice trembled. It wasn’t from pain at all. Beside Eliza, a large student follower crossed his arms.

“It turns out there’s still so much left.”

Alexia looked around the room.

Besides Alexia, Eliza and the others, there were still eight students left. And four corpses.

“All of a sudden I was enveloped in a white mist, and then I was attacked by a mysterious monster... I was still the vice president, so I gathered everyone together and fought desperately.”

A barricade was built at the exit of the classroom.

The barricade was covered in blood. The walls were also splattered with blood everywhere.

Alexia stole a glance at Eliza’s remaining magic power. That number was 1971.

“So, the vice president still has a lot of magic left.”

“I’m blessed with a good bloodline. My parents are my pride.”

Eliza said with a hint of pride.

“I see... What are you going to do now? The students are gathering in the auditorium, so I thought it would be safer to move there.”

“I want to do that, but I’m not sure how to go about it. The students in the classroom all have no magic power left.”

The students in the classroom, except for Eliza and her followers, all had less than 300 left.

“How about we move together?”

“That would be a great relief.”

Waiting for the preparations to finish, Alexia and the others left the classroom. The female student trembled again.

* * *

Alexia, Claire and Isaac led the way.

It was to avoid exhausting the students with low remaining magic power.

However, the amount of magic power Alexia had left was not enough.

“Less than 1000...”

Alexia was confused.

As her remaining magic power dwindled, she realized death was approaching.

“I’m 1100...”

“I still have 1300. I’ll protect you when the going gets tough.”

Isaac and Claire continued on.

They both had more advantages than Alexia, but they were still mentally drained.

But the one in the most difficult position of all was the girl she had just saved.

“Ah, Aah, no...”

She trembled and looked at the numbers, which were gradually decreasing.

The amount of magic left was 59.

The time left for her was approximately 10 minutes. However, there was nothing that could be done about it.

“Uuh... Uuhh...”

No one could find the words to say to her when she finally started crying.

At that moment, she felt some magic reactions around her.

“Be careful!”

She looked around, but there was nothing there but white mist.

No, that white mist was gathering magic power, which was transforming into a spirit. Currently, spirits were being created from the mist.

“You!”

Before the creature started moving, Alexia and the others slashed at it.

But the spirits created were numerous.

Christina and Nina, as well as the students in the back, joined the fight, and the cramped school building became a huge battlefield between humans and spirits.

“Damn, even from behind!”

“Asshole!”

“Hiiih, don’t come any closer!!”

But there was one among them who didn’t want to fight.

“Eliza-senpai, why aren’t you fighting?”

It was Suzuki who asked that.

“Call me Eliza-sama. It’s not time for me to fight yet. Aren’t you the one who doesn’t want to fight?”

Eliza mocked as she dodged the spirit sword with her brilliant footwork.

“I have less magic than Eliza-sama. I think you’re the one who should fight first.”

“Hey, shut up, junior.”

A large student who was among her followers disliked Suzuki. He also only used the meager amount of magic left to protect Eliza.

Suzuki chuckled as Eliza and her followers glared at him.

“I feel sorry for her. You’ve gone to the trouble of taking care of her, and now she’s going to die.”

Suzuki said, looking at the schoolgirl whose remaining magic power was finally below 10.

She was desperately fighting the spirit with her injured arm and what little magic she had left.

“It can’t be helped. There’s nothing we can do.”

Her remaining magic power was dwindling.

6, 5, 4...

“Not really. From what I can tell, this necklace has some interesting features.”

Suzuki said and approached the fighting female students.

He deflected the spirit sword that was swung at the female student with his magic-shrouded palm.

‘Clang’ the sword shattered into pieces.

“Eh!?”

The girl stared at Suzuki with a shocked face.

‘Clang’, the sound rang out again.

The spirit’s jaws shattered into pieces as she realized it. Suzuki slowly lowered his swinging palm.

“What did you just do?”

Eliza said in a loud voice.

“It’s just a simple exercise. No need to make a fuss.”

Suzuki smiled lightly and touched the girl’s necklace.

3, 2, 1... And the number was decreasing.

It was clear that she would not survive.

“Ah, Aah... no, I don’t want to die... Please!”

She said, as if pleading with him.

“You’ll be fine.”

Suzuki said and poured magic power into her necklace.

The next moment, the remaining magic power surged: 50, 100, 150...

“Ah... Thank you...”

The remaining magic power was 251.

She breathed a sigh of relief.

“Suzuki... What are you doing?”

Christina, who had finished the fight, said.

Most of the spirits had been killed and Claire had just cut down the last spirit.

Realizing the battle was over, Suzuki spoke.

“In the classroom, I checked the necklaces of the students who were victims. When I tried to channel magic power into them, the magic power accumulated in the necklaces, so I thought it was possible.”

Everyone listened to Suzuki’s explanation.

“The necklace has the function of transferring magic power. The transferred magic power is collected in other people’s necklaces and consumed... In other words, if you give magic power to a student with low remaining magic power, it can delay the explosion.”

“I’m surprised you realized that...”

Alexia said, impressed.

“Maybe this will reduce the death toll.”

Claire said.

“The student with the remaining magic is... Eliza-sama. Of course you’ll help us, right?”

Suzuki said with a smile.

Eliza also smiled.

“I’ll think about it when we arrive at the auditorium.”

“That’s good to hear. Oh yeah... When I checked the bodies of the students in class, there was something strange.”

“Something strange...?”

“Those bodies had bond marks on their limbs.”

“...Isn’t that just your imagination?”

Eliza’s eyes wavered for a moment.

“Another strange thing. All their necklaces have exploded.”

“So what? It’s only natural for necklaces to explode when the magic wears off.”

“Yes, that’s true. But if you think about it, it’s a very strange situation. They died because their necklaces exploded and they were tied up. I wonder what exactly happened?”

“...I don’t know what you mean.”

“Maybe someone tried the same thing I did to the living. Channeling magic into them, making them use magic. Or trying to figure out the conditions to activate the necklace, or trying to see if the necklace can be deactivated.... And the deciding factor is her.”

Suzuki pointed at the female student.

“When I transferred the magic power, she said ‘Thank you’. But that was strange. Normally, she would be surprised. No one should have known magic power could be transferred... But you knew all that, didn’t you?”

The female student paled and trembled.

“I-I...”

“You know, don’t you?”

“...I’m sorry. Eliza-sama is a great noble and I can’t refuse her. Students who opposed her were tied up and their necklaces removed, or they were forced to consume their magic until it reached zero.... In that process, it was discovered that magic could be transferred.”

“It’s also strange because only Eliza-sama has an unusual amount of magic left. All the other students had less than 300 left over. It was as if she had acclimatized.”

“...We all passed on our magic power to Eliza-sama. But I had so little magic power that I couldn’t give it to her, so I went to the corridor...”

The female student then began to cry.

“If that’s true, it’s a very serious situation.”

Alexia looked at Eliza.

“So... what are you going to do?” Eliza sighed and said.

"So you plead guilty."

"Guilty? As vice president, I was trying to help the students. I didn't know at the time that by trying to remove the necklace, or running out of magic, it would explode."

"How dare you be so blunt...! Then can you explain why you took away the students' magic power?"

"I didn't take it, I kept it. Of course I'll divide it fairly later."

"Do you really think that kind of reasoning will make you right?"

"Normally, that kind of reasoning would work... But as expected of Princess Alexia, it won't be easy. Ah right, let's make a deal."

"A deal?"

"I still have 1900 magic power. If you let me go, I will give you this magic. How?"

Alexia clicked her tongue.

The students' magic power had been exhausted by the current battle. If she accepted her magic power, it might be able to help them.

But if she accepted the deal, it meant her sins would be overlooked.

Even for Alexia, it was not easy to refuse a deal with a great noble.

"...Are you really going to give it?"

"Yes, of course. I'm willing to give you a lot of magic power, depending on the conditions."

Eliza had a smile on her face.

She knew that there was no way she could refuse.

Alexia looked around her at the students. Their faces were filled with a feeling of restlessness and exhaustion. Their lives were being eroded away at that very moment.

The only way to help them was to accept the deal.
“Alright. I accept the deal–”

Alexia was about to say that and then...

“You don’t seem to understand the situation.”

Suzuki said in the middle of Alexia’s voice.

He stood behind Eliza.

“Wha-! Since when did you!?”

“...Don’t move.”

Eliza and her followers tried to turn around in panic, but Suzuki stopped them with a low voice.

His hand was on Eliza’s neck... No, he was touching her necklace.

“What will happen if I take this necklace off right now? Eliza-sama knows that, right?”

“What are you trying to do!? Do you know what will happen if you do this to me!?”

Eliza was an outstanding swordsman.

“Suzuki, stop it. Even the Hope family doesn’t have the will to oppose her yet.”

Christina also said.

“Oh my. No one seems to understand the situation.”

Suzuki sighed so that everyone could hear him.

“What do you mean...!?”

“Eliza-sama, no one who has protected you so far can reach you here. The great noble position, the power of the factions, the wealth you have built so high, none can reach you in this white mist.”

“I’m Eliza. I’m a representative of the Midgar Kingdom...”

“So what? What does it matter? If I kill Eliza-sama in this white mist, what will they witness? Will those who have been deprived of magic by you testify for you?”

Eliza looked around the students as if to ease the tension.

None of the students wanted to make eye contact with Eliza.

“Have you understood? Your current position...”

Suzuki whispered in her ear.

He then pressed the necklace firmly.

“...Alright! I apologize.”

Eliza said in a small voice.

“There is no need to apologize. Please share your magic with the students.”

“...Of course.”

Eliza’s eyes were filled with hatred, as if she could kill someone with her gaze.

“Is that alright, Princess Alexia? This is an emergency. Eliza-sama will be punished in court after everything is over. And of course, if necessary, I will receive punishment as well.”

“Are you sure? If you threaten a noble, Suzuki-kun might be treated harshly.”

“I’m prepared for that.”

“I see... What about the Hope family?”

Alexia asked Cristina.

“If I can get Alexia-sama’s testimony in court. Everything has been revealed here, so it won’t end so badly.”

Cristina said firmly.

“Thank you.”

Suzuki lowered his head with a bow.

“Not that I... it’s because I have my own thoughts.”

Christina said, turning away with a frown.

The magic power was then given.

Eliza’s magic power had only 400 left. She decided to share 1500 with the students who didn’t have much magic.

“As you know, it’s forbidden to take away their magic power anymore.”

“We should hurry to the auditorium. I don’t want to be attacked by spirits again.”

After the transfer of magic power, the group split into two.

Eliza and the students went to the auditorium, while Alexia and the others tracked where the magic went.

“Remember this well...!”

Eliza said to Suzuki as she left.

But he glanced at Eliza while passing by her, as if he was looking at a rock by the roadside.

“This is all an illusion... Everything happens only in a white mist...”

And she said that meaningfully as she turned away.

* * *

Alexia and her friends left the school building and followed the necklace’s magic.

The attacks of the spirits had died down since then, with only minor fights occurring infrequently.

“Who exactly is he...?”

Alexia asked in a small voice as she lined up next to Cristina.

“A distant relative of the Hope family. I’m sure he doesn’t have any special abilities. But...”

Christina’s gaze fell on Suzuki, who was walking at the back of the line.

“He’s no ordinary person. The courage to face a great noble head-on is not something easily acquired.”

“He uses physical techniques I’ve never seen before, even in combat. Perhaps he is hiding his strength.”

“I wonder if there’s a reason...”

“I don’t know. But I intend to keep him under surveillance as the head of the family from now on.”

“That’s good...”

It would be very bad to leave him unsupervised. Also, it was dangerous.

“You have to be careful. He knows a lot of things. He’s like a different person.”

Isaac, who was next to them in line, said.

“What do you mean?”

“About the necklace. He said he investigated it himself, but I don’t think he could investigate that much in a short time in a classroom. He was also the one who realized the magic that came from the necklace. Maybe he knew all this from the beginning. If you think about it that way, it makes sense.”

Saying that, Isaac’s eyes narrowed sharply.

"He was so calm about the situation, and when the white mist hit, he became a different person... that's because he was one of the masterminds."

"...Do you have any proof?"

"There's no conclusive evidence yet. But we will get it. Princess Alexia, please be careful."

Saying that, he quickened his pace.

Indeed, Isaac had a point.

The sudden change in Suzuki after the white mist formed was more than enough to confirm he was on the Cult's side.

If that was the case, they were being controlled by Suzuki.

"...Strange man." Christina said.

Christina saw Isaac walking in front of her.

"Strange?"

"No, nothing."

Hearing Alexia's question, Cristina shook her head.

"...The magic seems to continue here."

Claire stopped at a small old church on the edge of the academy.

"I didn't know there was a church here."

"There isn't."

It was Nina who answered Alexia's question.

"What do you mean?"

"Like I said. There is no church here. Not before the white mist enveloped it."

With that, they opened the door and went inside.

Inside the church there was silence, as if everyone had forgotten about it. The chairs were covered in dust.

Alexia moved forward carefully to a pedestal-like spot at the far end.

“Down here.”

Claire said. She could feel a faint current of air coming from under the pedestal.

“Hah!”

Claire kicked the pedestal without hesitation. But there was only a low rumbling sound.

“Ouch! What is this!?”

“The magic barrier... It’s an artifact. You need a key to move it.”

Nina touched the pedestal and said.

“What key? Where is it?”

“I don’t know where it is. Hopefully it’s close by.”

“Let’s search.”

Everyone searched the area for a while. But no clues were found.

“No luck. There’s nothing here.”

Alexia said.

“It’s the same here. Are you sure there’s a clue?”

Isaac was frustrated.

“We’re running out of time. We have to hurry...”

Alexia’s magic power was down to 500. Even though there was rarely any fighting along the way, her magic power was more drained than she imagined.

The students in the auditorium must have decreased as well.

“Deciphering the artifact seems difficult. I’m not a specialist...”

Nina said.

“There’s nothing here either.”

Christina and Suzuki also seemed unable to find anything.

Then a deep silence fell.

All they could do was stare at the pedestal in confusion.

At that moment, there was a small thumping sound. They saw Claire slamming her right fist into the pedestal.

“It’s no use, Claire.”

Alexia stopped her.

But Claire returned to clenching her right fist. Her voice was quieter than before.

“Please... Give me your strength. I have work to do. I can’t end up in this place like this...!”

Claire then removed the bandage on her right hand. Isaac and Christina gasped at the magic circle engraved there.

“That...!”

“Please, Aurora, give me your power. You’ve been silent all this time, but I know you can handle it.”

Claire only spoke with her right hand.

“What did she do?”

“Who is she talking to?”

“Ssh. Keep quiet.”

Alexia silenced Isaac and Cristina.

“Please... Please, Aurora... Answer me... Answer my voice!”

At that moment, Claire’s magic circle began to glow.

The light turned the area red and carved countless ancient letters on the pedestal.

“T-this power...!”

It was Isaac’s astonished voice.

“Open, open uuuuup!”

A red magic power enveloped the pedestal and then exploded.

And then... The pedestal vanished without a trace. Underneath the pedestal, a staircase led to the basement.

“Unbelievable...”

Christina muttered anxiously. The immense magic power that Claire displayed was out of the ordinary.

“You answered, Aurora... Kuh... My right hand is throbbing... This is the reward of power...!”

Claire let out a long breath while holding her right hand firmly in pain.

“Are you okay, Claire?”

Alexia supported Claire’s shoulder.

“I’m fine. Let’s continue. We don’t have much time.”

Claire forced herself to catch her breath and act strong.

“Let’s go... save everyone.”

Then, with Claire in the lead, they descended the stairs.

It was a very long staircase.

There was almost no visibility in front or behind due to the darkness and fog. There was only silence and the sound of footsteps.

By the time they reached the end of the stairs, Alexia’s magic power had decreased from 500 to 450.

“Big door.”

A large door appeared in the dimly lit basement.

Alexia and the others opened the heavy door and continued on their way.

Beyond it was a slightly open space. On both sides were rows of broken prisons. The prison was empty.

“Is this... a dungeon?”

Alexia and the others proceeded cautiously. After a while, they heard something heavy moving behind them.

“What is it...”

Claire muttered in surprise.

In the darkness, they could not see what was happening behind them. Alexia turned around, feeling as if she had forgotten something important.

“The church basement... Down a long flight of stairs, a secret room... And then the door closed behind me.”

Alexia recalled the head librarian’s words. The situation was very similar to the present.

“-! Get back! It’s a trap!!!”

Alexia rushed behind her. But there was a loud bang and the door closed.

At the same time, gas gushed out from a small hole in the ceiling. A fragrant odor filled the area.

“Hold your breath!”

But it was already too late.

One by one, they fell unconscious. Alexia was the last one left.

“No way, in a place like this...”

In her fading consciousness, Alexia saw a boy wearing a gas mask.

“Gosh, I didn’t expect you to sneak this far, Princess Alexia.”

“Don’t tell me, you...”

“Exactly, I’m one of the masterminds.”

Isaac chuckled in his gas mask. Alexia reached for her sword, but she was losing consciousness.

I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
and hoped to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood,
"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence
in Shadow

I can't remember the moment anymore.
Yet, I had desired to become "The Eminence in Shadow"
ever since I could remember.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene,
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more

If I Could Get it, I Could Destroy the World!

Epilogue

Epilogue

If I Could Get it, I Wouldn’t Hesitate to Destroy the World.

“Ugh...”

Christina woke up from her long sleep.

Her body felt heavy and her consciousness was unclear. Her last memory was when she descended into the dungeon.

“This place...”

Her limbs were restrained to the wall.

She tried to break free, but she could not do so. It seemed that her magic power was sealed.

“Oh, you seem to be awake. That’s amazing.”

She looked in the direction of the voice and saw Isaac was there.

“Why... am I restrained?”

Christina said.

“Because I’m the one restraining you.”

“I see.”

“So you’re not surprised?”

“Because I think you’re a strange person. You must be hiding something, most people are usually like that.”

“That’s good to know.”

“And the others?”

“Princess Alexia and Claire-san are in the hands of my lord.”

“Your lord?”

“Yes, in my lord’s hands.”

He repeated the same words. He didn’t seem to intend to say much more.

“Suzuki, he’s sleeping over there.”

Isaac pointed to a wall not far away.

Suzuki was also being held there, just like Christina.

“Suzuki...”

A sigh of relief escaped Christina.

“Unfortunately, he may never wake up again.”

‘What do you mean?

“The gas that put you all to sleep is a destructive drug for those with low magic power. It is not uncommon for them to fall into an eternal sleep and not wake up.”

“Suzuki...”

“It’s not like it’s just you, Christina-san. He is just a lowly noble of a branch family. There should be no need for you to grieve.”

“That’s true, but...”

When Isaac explained that, Christina realized how upset she was.

He was right, Suzuki was just a lowly noble from a branch family. As a noble, there should be many options for Christina.

“I thought his abilities would be useful to the Hope family... That’s all.”

“I see. Well, it doesn’t matter whether Suzuki lives or dies.”

“doesn’t matter, you say...!”

Christina looked down on Isaac.

“Yeah, it doesn’t matter. I just want to finish my work...”

“What are you going to do?”

“Christina-san’s body has a lot of potential. We’ll use it in our organization.”

“What organization? The rumored Shadow Garden?”

“Shadow Garden? Don’t equate us with an organization that has such a short history. We’ve ruled the world for far longer... Let’s stop, there’s no point in talking to you like this. You’ll become a puppet who’s lost her mind.”

After saying that, Isaac took out a syringe filled with red liquid.

“Let’s finish the job quickly, If I’m slow, I won’t be in time to celebrate the resurrection of the right arm. You should be able to become the second child. Unfortunately, Suzuki, won’t even make it to third.”

Isaac laughed contemptuously and pressed the syringe into Christina’s arm.

“Stop...! Right, where’s Nina-senpai!”

“...That woman disappeared.”

Isaac’s face turned pale.

“Disappeared?”

“I’m sure I put you all to sleep. She disappeared before I realized it. There’s no way she came out of that shrine alive anyway. I’ll have to report it later...”

Saying this, Isaac put pressure on the syringe.

“No...!”

“It’s time to say goodbye...”

At that moment, something moved in the corner of his vision.

“How noisy... I slept so well.”

The voice was Suzuki, who should have been asleep.

“S-Suzuki...!”

“Wha... Y-You’re awake!?”

“I can tell just from looking at him. Is this so surprising?”

He let out a long yawn.

“Y-Yeah, whatever, waking up won’t change the outcome. Let’s get rid of you first, you’re an eyesore.”

Isaac headed towards the restrained Suzuki with the syringe.

“Get rid of me?”

“Hmph. I’ll turn you into a dumb doll.”

The needle from the injection pierced Suzuki’s neck.

“You want to get rid of me...?”

Suzuki said, a smile at the corner of his lips.

“-That’s impossible.”

The next moment, Isaac’s body trembled. The syringe filled with red liquid fell and rolled.

“Wha-!... *Gohh... *Gohoh*.”

Suzuki’s right arm slammed into Isaac’s stomach.

...Palm strike.

A powerful palm strike struck Isaac in the abdomen.

“Impossible...! How could you release the restraints...? Your magic should have been sealed!”

Isaac recoiled, holding his stomach. A trickle of blood escaped from his lips.

“It’s easy. Just slide the joints.”

Suzuki said and released the restraints on his left arm. The joint deformed in a motion impossible for humans, and when he released the restraints, it returned to normal as if in reverse regeneration.

He released the restraints on his legs in the same way.

“Impossible...!”

“So, what are you going to do? Didn’t you want to get rid of me?”

“...Don’t underestimate me!”

Isaac’s eyes flashed anger.

“A lowly student like you dares to mock me...!?”

He drew his sword and got ready.

Suzuki also grabbed the sword at his waist, then he tilted his head in confusion.

“Where’s my sword...?”

All that was at Suzuki’s waist was the scabbard.

“What a pity. I put the weapon away.”

“I see.”

Suzuki took a pen from his pocket. He then unscrewed the cap and pointed the tip at Isaac.

“Then... this will be enough.”

“P-Pen...? No kidding!!”

Isaac’s magic power exploded.

He stepped up in an instant and swung his sword to the side. The trajectory of the sword should definitely have split Suzuki in two.

Except that the pen wasn’t in the way.

Suzuki blocked the sword with the tip of his pen.

A high-pitched sound like breaking glass was heard, and Isaac’s sword shattered into pieces.

Suzuki thrust out his pen.

“Wha...! Gahhhh!”

And the sharp tip hit Isaac.

A step or two later, Isaac slowly backed away.

He touched the pen stuck in his neck, as if he was looking at something extraordinary.

“*Gohoh*... no way, just a pen...”

Drip.

Red ink dripped from the pen.

“Come back here. I can’t write a diary without it.”

Suzuki grabbed the pen that was stuck in Isaac's neck.

"Wait... Don't... Stop, stop!"

As soon as the pen was pulled out, a large amount of blood gushed out.

Blood ink stained the floor.

"Ah... Aaah..."

Shocked, Isaac fell down.

Then he looked up at Suzuki and his eyes widened.

What was at the end of his gaze was Suzuki's necklace. His remaining magic power was an incredible amount.

"What the... that magic power... *Goho*."

Isaac collapsed, and coughed up blood.

"I... wouldn't... in a place like this... *Gohoh*... Aah..."

Blood flowed unstoppably from his neck, and finally his breathing weakened.

Suzuki looked at the bloodstained pen with a bored look.

"It's getting dirty, I'll just throw it away."

He then dumped it on top of Isaac's corpse.
He turned around and walked towards Christina.

Christina felt anxious when she looked at Suzuki, who had bad eyes.

"Ah... Umm..."

Her heart was racing for some reason. She stared at Suzuki, not knowing what to say.

"I'm glad you're okay."

Suzuki released Christina’s restraints.

“T-Thank you Suzuki...”

In a small, muffled voice, she said.

“I just did what I had to do. Now, let’s hurry up. I’m worried about the other students.”

“U-Um, wait, Suzuki!”

Christina stopped Suzuki as he was about to walk away.

“Umm... It seems I misunderstood you. I thought you were a lowly student who couldn’t do anything... But that was all wrong.”

Christina looked down in shame.

“If you don’t mind, when this matter is over, I will take you to the main family...”

“...You’re not wrong, Christina-neesan. I am just a lowly student.”

Suzuki said this with his back turned.

“Eh? But, that doesn’t mean...”

“You are not wrong, you are not wrong at all.”

Suzuki’s voice was the coldest Christina had ever heard.

“Ah... Did I say something that offended you...?”

“No, it’s nothing. It’s just... Don’t get involved with me. All that lies ahead of me is a bloody road... I am someone who cannot live in a world where the sun shines.”

Suzuki did not look back. He spoke with his back turned, as if rejecting the world.

“What burden do you bear...?”

“I have a mission. I took on the sins of the world, and I’m still doing it... If you get involved, you’ll get hurt and covered in blood.”

Suzuki finally turned around.

Christina gasped when she saw his eyes. His eyes were the same as glass balls, seemingly emotionless.

But they weren't.

Deep inside the glass orbs, emotions swirled like black flames.

Suzuki gently grabbed Christina's neck.

Christina's thin chin lifted and Suzuki's face came closer.

"Suzuki..."

A voice like a breath escaped.

Christina closed her eyes, mesmerized by his deep eyes.

Then, there was a crackling and crunching sound.

"Eh...?"

When she opened her eyes, the necklace had disappeared.

"Ah... The necklace... How come?"

He did not answer Christina's question. Before she realized it, Suzuki's necklace was also gone.

"We don't have time. Let's hurry."

Suzuki turned around and walked away. His back felt lonely.

"W-Wait, Suzuki!"

Christina chased after him so as not to be left behind.

* * *

[It’s time to wake up. This situation is not very good.]

Claire woke up as she felt a voice in her head.

“This...”

There, in the white mist, she was handcuffed to a testing table that looked like a bad surgical table.

Beside her, Alexia was also handcuffed.

“Alexia, are you okay? Wake up!”

“Ugh... Where am I...?”

Alexia also woke up. They looked around and were shocked.

“This is...!”

“What is this...!”

There were four cylindrical capsules. Inside were red liquid and humans.

“Don’t tell me they are the missing students...?”

“I’m sure of it. They are students on the missing persons list.”

“Why do this to them...?”

“It absorbs magic. To awaken the Demon Diabolos... We need to get out of here as soon as possible. We’ll suffer the same fate.”

Alexia tried to release the restraints, but did not budge. Claire tried, but the same thing happened to her.

“It’s like something is blocking my magic.”

“Isaac’s an asshole, how dare he do this.”

Alexia let out the words in a high tone.

At that moment, the cylindrical capsule began to move. With the sound of slow movement, the red liquid drained from both capsules.

“W-What happened?”

“I don’t know...”

At that moment, a voice sounded from behind.

“You guys are awake already. Just in time. I just finished preparing the capsules... About 10 percent left.”

Saying that, a boy with silvery white hair appeared.

The two fell silent at the sight of that beautiful figure, who looked as if he had just stepped out of a fairy tale.

“Who are you...?”

“I’m Fenrir. The fifth seat of Rounds.”

“F-Fenrir!?”

The boy, who introduced himself as Fenrir, was still quite young like Alexia and the others, perhaps even younger.

“Age really means nothing in the face of eternal life.”

Fenrir said, standing in front of two capsules filled with red liquid.

“What are you going to do?”

“I will put you into these capsules. To revive the Diabolos’ right arm. I was planning to absorb the magic from the necklace, but that was made easier by having you guys here. This saves me a lot of trouble.”

Fenrir laughed mockingly.

"The Academy is in chaos right now. Don't think you'll get away with it."
Claire said.

"Who will punish us? The knights? Or you?"

"I-It's..."

"We live in the underworld. You will never be able to reach us from the outside."

"The Shadow Garden is here..."

When Alexia said something low-pitched, Fenrir's movements stopped.

"So the Shadow Garden will punish us... kuku."

He chuckled.

"What's so funny?"

"I didn't expect a royal princess to be dependent on a group of strangers. I just find it pathetic..."

"...!"

Alexia's face turned red. The sound of gnashing back teeth could be heard.

"First of all, is Shadow Garden really going to punish us? What exactly is this Shadow Garden organization? You guys don't know anything."

While saying that, he took out the bodies that were the students from the capsule and threw them away.

"They are underworld dwellers like us. They are not entities that will punish us. Even if one of us loses, the one who wins will rule the underworld again. That's all."

Fenrir looked back. His eyes had turned red.

"Well now, the preparations are complete. It's time for the reviving process."

Fenrir turned to Claire first.

“Claire Kagenou. I received reports that you were using strange powers.”

Fenrir stood near the testing table and raised his chin.

“...Let go of me!”

“It is indeed thick blood, but not unusual. Alright, let’s see if we can figure it out.”

She said then pressed a syringe filled with red liquid into Claire’s neck.

Claire shook her head and resisted, but Fenrir’s strength was very strong.

“It’s no use.”

The syringe was stuck in her neck.

Then...

[Geez, how much longer are you going to make me wait?]

Aurora’s voice echoed in Claire’s head and the dense magic overflowed.

The syringe broke and the restraint slipped off.

“What is this magic power!?”

Fenrir moved away.

[I’ll lend you some of my power.]

“Thank you, Aurora.”

Claire then drew her sword and broke Alexia’s restraint.

“Well done, Claire.”

Alexia also drew her sword and got ready.

“Claire Kagenou... you just said Aurora, right?”

Fenrir looked straight at Claire.

“I did. Do you know Aurora?”

“Kuku... I see. Let’s see if it’s real. Blood Fang... Answer my call.”

Fenrir took out a sword from the void.

The sword was longer than his height and had a fiery blood-red blade.

“Blood Fang... The magic sword of a swordsman who was once called the strongest. Don’t tell me...”

Alexia muttered. From that magic sword, she felt a heavy pressure that sent shivers down her spine.

“Be careful, Claire.”

“I know. Aurora won’t fight?”

[There’s not much magic left. If I use your body, I’ll lose a lot of things. And maybe you should learn to use your powers as well.”]

“...I think so too.”

Claire honed the magic inside her body. Little by little, she began to understand the sensation of two foreign powers blending into one.

Then, Claire closed the distance between them in an instant.

Fenrir, however, took Claire's sword for granted.

"Is this the extent of it... What?"

A red tentacle wrapped around Blood Fang. That tentacle, extending from Claire's right arm, moved under her direction to entangle the Blood Fang.

"With this power...!"

"Don't get cocky just yet."

Fenrir drew the blood fang. With just that one move, the red tentacles erupted.

Claire made the next move.

She stepped into the gap, dodged the blood fang, and then slashed directly at Fenrir's body.

A rumbling sound echoed out.

Fenrir managed to block Claire's sword with the hilt of his blood fang.

"W-With the hilt?"

"You did win the Bushin Festival... But it's just a child's sword."

Fenrir turned his blood fang over, flicked Claire's sword away and hit her chin with the hilt.

"Ugggh."

The blow was light. Claire jumped back as fast as she could, reducing her strength.

But her mouth hurt and her lips turned red. Fenrir began to charge towards Claire, who had lost her stance.

At that moment, Fenrir's movement stopped.

His left shoulder had somehow been pierced by the sword.

“Unbelievable. If I keep moving, I might get stabbed in the heart.”

It was Alexia.

“I know you’re looking for an opportunity. But when did you...”

Fenrir stepped back, drawing his blood fang. Blood gushed from his left shoulder, but he did not care at all.

“Hah!”

Letting out a loud gasp, Fenrir swung his blood fang. The attack was powerful and contained immense force.

Alexia prepared herself to defend with her sword. Her movements were not fast. The magic power in her sword was also small.

There was no way she could withstand the attack.

The blood fang shattered Alexia’s sword. Right before that, Alexia took half a step back. Then she changed the angle of the sword and let the attack flow.

“Ohh~”

She then turned around to counterattack.

With a short movement and the least amount of magic power, she attacked Fenrir’s vital point.

Fenrir should have died if hit by that attack.

He seemed to have no other choice but to wait to be hit by Alexia’s stab, with his blood fang still unsheathed.

But, Fenrir pounded the ground with his foot.

The ground cracked with a tremendous vibration, and he positioned himself in a move that was impossible for an ordinary person to do.

Alexia’s sword shot into the air and made a cut on Fenrir’s cheek.

Fenrir remained in the same position, but was far behind.

“A commoner’s sword... A sword compared to Princess Iris and hated...”

“A commoner’s sword shouldn’t be that bad.”

“I hope to meet you in a hundred years. Sword is accumulation. The most important thing is, you should be able to see the difference between the two.”

Saying that, Fenrir closed his eyes.

“Let’s be a little more serious...”

The pressure changed.

Unexpected magic power radiated out from within Fenrir.

At the same time, his hair turned white. His face underwent some weight lameness and his limbs became emaciated.

Then he slowly opened his eyes.

The innocent boy had turned into a shabby old man.

“So that’s what he really looks like...”

He was so weak that it looked as if he would faint if pushed.

But Alexia and Claire never underestimated him. Because, despite his appearance, the weight of the pressure had increased tremendously.

Cold sweat ran down their cheeks.

[I remember... the Demon of Midgar.]

“The Demon of Midgar?”

Claire heard Aurora’s murmur.

[Long ago, he was a feared assassin in the Midgar region. He was a greedy assassin who only wanted to increase his own power. He should be old...]

“I don’t think anyone knows that name. Is that Aurora?”

Fenrir said in a wrinkled voice.

“Calamity Witch... So it’s real. You intend to use that girl as your sacrifice huh?”

“Aurora, what does that mean?”

[Focus. It was just a trick to catch you off guard.]

“But...!”

“Claire!”

“Eh?”

Fenrir’s blood fang extended.

Like a whip, the long blade loomed over Claire’s neck.

Shocked, Claire witnessed the approaching death.

But the next moment, Claire’s eyes turned purple. Over a hundred tentacles shot out, and when the blood fang was parried, the tentacles approached Fenrir in an instant.

“Nails... This is it, this is its power.”

Fenrir dodged the red tentacles that descended relentlessly with his slender body.

The tentacles repeatedly snatched at his body, turning his clothes into rags.

But the tentacles could not even scratch his body. And suddenly, all the bloody tentacles exploded and disappeared.

“My magic power...!”

The violet-eyed Claire, on her knees, was breathing heavily. Her magic power was only 36.

“Are you getting weaker, or am I getting stronger, Aurora?”

“...If only this body wasn’t so weak.”

Then, the blood fang slammed into Claire.

“Ugh...!”

She barely managed to avoid a fatal wound, but she rolled over, unable to even hold her prostrate body.

And Claire’s eyes turned from purple back to red.

“How dare you do that to Claire!!!”

Alexia attacked.

Her movements were not fast and weak. Surely Fenrir was far superior to that.

What Alexia saw was a red shadow.

And then her sword shattered into pieces.

“A-Aah...”

“Sword is a pedestal... The peak beyond a thousand years is still too far away.”

After saying that, Fenrir stood upright on it.

“My sword...”

His sword shattered into pieces. The humiliation of the past came back.

He had trained himself so that he would not regret it again. However, no matter how many times the swords were stacked, the top of the sword was too far away.

Tears appeared in the corners of Alexia’s eyes.

“...It’s over.”

The blood fang swung down from above.

At that moment, the sound of a strong gust of wind was heard. Fenrir stopped his attack and quickly moved back.

With a click, a pen stuck into the ground.

“Who are you?”

“You...”

There was Suzuki, an ordinary schoolboy with bad eyes.

“Are you okay?”

He slowly walked over and pulled out the pen stuck in the ground.

‘Princess Alexia, come here.’

Christina said, making Alexia step back.

“I-I’m still...”

“That’s too much, you have no magic power left.”

Before long, Alexia’s magic power was also below 100. She bit her lip and looked at Suzuki.

“Fenrir is very strong. He can’t face it alone.”

“I don’t think Suzuki will lose so easily.”

Christina’s eyes looked bright as she said that. Suzuki would face Fenrir alone.

“I ask again. Who are you?”

Fenrir looked at Suzuki.

"I am Suzuki. A first-year student at the Midgar Spell Swordsmen Academy."

Suzuki said, playing with the pen in his palm.

"An ordinary student huh..."

Suddenly, Fenrir swung his blood fang. The red blade twitched like a whip and struck Suzuki's bangs.

"For a student, you have a good grasp of distance."

"Distance? What are you talking about?"

Calmly, Suzuki stepped forward.

That was Fenrir's distance. Fenrir's eyes narrowed sharply.

The sound of Suzuki's footsteps sounded very loud.

Footsteps sounded again.

The next moment, the blood fang barrage began.

Red shadows flowed down from above, below, right and left with incredible speed. The single sword stroke was exquisite, like a dance that the naked eye could not see.

In the midst of it all, Suzuki held up a pen.

Four on each side, tucked between the rows as if they were fingernails.

The tip of the golden pen shines.

Then the red sword dance and golden light met.

Schwing, *schwing*, *schwing*, the sound of battle rang out many times in quick succession.

Red shadows and golden light danced in the mist.

"Great..."

Alexia stared in fascination.

Fenrir’s sword was clearly worthy of being one of the strongest. And Suzuki’s ability to counterbalance that sword with a pen was also beyond reason.

Even compared to the Knights of the King’s Guard of the Midgar Kingdom and the Seven Swords of the Begalta Empire, they were utter nobodies...

“Too strong...”

Christina muttered.

She was right, Suzuki’s strength far surpassed that of a student.

“Who is he?”

Alexia’s question was natural.

“I don’t know. But he bears a great burden. He has a mission to accomplish... That’s what he said.”

“Mission... The power to do that...”

Alexia clenched her hands into fists.

“Claire-san, are you okay?”

Cristina helped Claire up from her fall.

“I-I don’t know what to say... to Suzuki who fought.”

Claire said with pain.

“We can’t participate in this fight. We’ll see how it turns out.”

“Right...”

Claire held her right hand, which was engraved with a magic circle tightly.

In the mist, the battle between Fenrir and Suzuki continued.

The situation slowly began to reverse.

The red shadow pushed away the golden light. The tip of the pen, shining in the mist, slowly retreated.

The reason was the difference in distance between the two.

Fenrir's blood fang was much longer than a normal sword, while Suzuki's fountain pen could not even reach a normal sword.

As a result, Fenrir attacked unilaterally and Suzuki had no choice but to defend.

"The winner has been decided. You, too, who seek to master power, will realize this distance can never be reached."

Fenrir's voice could be heard between the barrage of attacks.

"Is that so?"

Suzuki kicked the ground and flew up.

He then readied his pens and threw them at Fenrir.

The eight pens became golden light and were released.

"What a waste of energy..."

Fenrir retreated and handled the pens with her blood fangs.

A few of them struck him body and injured him, but that was all. After throwing his weapon, Suzuki had no way to fight back.

It was supposed to be like that.

"What!?"

Suzuki had eight more pens in the air.

"Hidden technique :《Golden Rainstorm》"

And the pens were launched one after another.

The light from these pens showered Fenrir as if it were rain.

“It doesn’t hurt...!”

However, Fenrir’s ability was also extraordinary.

He avoided the rain of pens with agile movements, and deflected them with his blood fang if he felt he could not avoid them.

The golden rain fell to the ground without hitting Fenrir.

And all the rain stopped.

The number of pens stuck in the ground was overwhelming.

In the midst of it all, Fenrir stood. He didn’t move an inch. No, he could not move.

“Checkmate.”

Because Suzuki was standing behind her.

“Is the pen just a decoy?”

“They say pens are sharper than swords.”

Suzuki held one of the pens to Fenrir’s neck.

“You still have one, huh? Looks like I played too much. It’s been a long time since I played around. I can’t help being unhappy. It’s a bad habit of old people.”

“Whatever you say.”

Without hearing the end of Fenrir’s words, Suzuki stabbed his pen.

He pierced Fenrir’s neck and blood gushed out through it.

“Guahh...! Impatient young man. You should listen to this old man.”

Fenrir’s eyes turned red.

A large amount of magic power overflowed, and Suzuki was ejected. The wound on his neck healed, as if regenerating.

“Playtime is over. Let’s start with the little ones first...”

Fenrir’s face turned toward Alexia and the others. The first prey was one of them, Christina.

“Ah...!”

Christina’s spine shivered as he let out a red glare. The pressure she had never felt before was about to crush her.

“Goodbye, Miss.”

And then a red slash swung down on Christina.

She could only stare in dismay at her impending death.

Just before the blood fang split her in half, a figure came.

The figure embraced her and replaced her slash.

Blood splattered.

“Suzuki... You...!”

That figure was Suzuki.

“Thank goodness you survived... *Gohoh*!

Suzuki vomited a lot of blood.

“Suzuki, Suzuki, are you okay!? Why are you protecting me...!?”

“I owe you an apology...”

Suzuki said, his mouth turning red.

“You don’t need to apologize, it’s not the time for that, right now what matters is you...!”

“No, it has to be now. Because I’m...”

“Eh?”

“...not Suzuki.”

“He is dead. My true form is...”

Many of the pens stuck in the ground began to melt.

They turned into black slime and enveloped Suzuki’s body.

“S-Suzuki...”

At this strange sight, Christina and the others retreated.

The black slime enveloping Suzuki revealed itself in a gripping and frightening manner.

“My name is Shadow. I lurk in the darkness and hunt in the shadows...”
The man, wearing a long jet black coat and a hood, drew a black sword and said.

“Shadow!?”

Alexia’s astonished voice.

“Shadow...”

Christina was also surprised. But as she stared at Shadow, she felt her heart pounding slightly.

“Shadow huh. I knew you would come...”

Fenrir showed no signs of anxiety. He was filled with his magic power and faced Shadow.

“You disguised yourself as an ordinary student to wait for an opportunity? You’re a clever guy, too.”

“What? It’s just a side entertainment.”

“Pathetic. You can’t possibly do something that complicated just for the sake of entertainment. I’m not so senile as to be able to misread your intentions.”

“...Oh?”

“People lie to hide things they don’t want to be known. Behind every lie is the truth.”

“That makes sense.”

“You took the trouble to disguise yourself as a student, looking for an opportunity and avoiding a direct fight with me. There was only caution. You’re trying to hide your fear of me with lies as mere entertainment.”

“Hmph... Don’t make me laugh, old man.”

“If true, it’s a shame. How great is this man called Shadow really? Is he a man beyond my imagination who has reached the peak of the sword after so many years...? This will be a bit of fun.”

Fenrir then raised his blood fang.

“Would you like to try it?”

Shadow lightly raised his jet black sword.

“I intend to.”

Fenrir’s hips dropped deeply. He stepped away slightly, his blood fang drawn far back. “Shadow, do not disappoint me.”

The next moment, Fenrir’s figure disappeared in a swirl of white mist.

“Ancient sword technique: *Shadow*.”

Fenrir appeared behind Shadow.

His blood fang was swung and he was in mist form.

“Oh...? You parried it.”

Fenrir said happily.

One scratch on Shadow’s long coat. This was a claw mark caused by Fenrir.

“I’ve parried fast sword attacks many times. But this sword is... slow.”

Shadow recovered the scratches on his long coat and looked back.

“Do you realize it’s too late?”

White mist swirled around Fenrir.

“...Interesting.”

Shadow silently assessed the flow of magic.

The next moment, Fenrir disappeared again. Another wound was scratched into Shadow’s long coat. It was deeper than the first strike.

“Again, you dodged it.”

Fenrir tried to get back behind Shadow.

“You’re so slow.”

Shadow patted the wound on his long coat and recovered.

“You can see the sword in the *Shadow*?”

“I almost saw it, but I couldn’t.”

“Then how did you avoid it?”

“I ducked just as the blades were approaching. That’s all.”

“Jujutsu huh? I’ve heard of martial arts that neutralize attacks like Willow’s.”

“I’ve never studied any martial arts.”

“So that’s your natural power?”

“Not that great.”

‘Then what?”

“Practice.”

“Oh? So that’s the truth of your power.”

And Fenrir lowered his hips and readied his blood fang.

“Then, accept the training from this old wolf.”

“...So be it.”

Shadow swung his sword. Towards the empty space.

“...Excellent.”

Then, Fenrir’s figure disappeared.

The next moment, Fenrir appeared behind Shadow. Blood spurted from Fenrir’s shoulder.

“...Already seen, huh?”

Fenrir said, holding the wound on his shoulder.

“No, I’m following the flow of magic.”

“I see... So the trick was already conceded.”

“The *Shadow* is the shadow of magic. Its counterpart is the slow sword, whose presence has been erased to the utmost extent.”

“That’s right. When you saw the *Shadow*, I was already swinging my sword. You saw me clearly. So your power is really real.”

Fenrir turned around and got ready again.

“Do you still want to continue?”

“Of course. I’ve been looking forward to this day for a long time. I can’t swing the sword alone.”

Then he extended his blood fang.

“Accept the *Shadow* technique that has broken through the boundary, Shadow.”

Fenrir swung his blood fang.

But Shadow dodged it first.

The white mist parted, carving a cut mark on the ground. After that, the blood fang shot out like a whip.

Attack and defense, the order of which was reversed, were further accelerated by Fenrir’s technique.

The number of blood fangs increased.

One, two, three... Every time Fenrir used the blood fang, the number increased, eventually reaching nine.

Fenrir laughed as he raised his nine blood fangs.

“This is the pinnacle of swords... Blood fangs from the *Shadow* sky.”

Nine blades attacked Shadow from all directions simultaneously.

“Oh...”

Shadow exhaled.

“Are all the blades I see just shadows?”

Then he closed his eyes as if he had given up.

The next moment, Shadow’s body was torn apart by nine slashes.

Right, left, up, down... He was viciously attacked, as if playing with a puppet.

“Shadow...!”

“Shadow-san!”

Alexia and Cristina shouted. It was the most vicious attack they had ever seen.

Fenrir stared at Shadow, who had fallen helplessly.

Shadow’s fingers twitched.

“...Is that all?”

It was Shadow who said it.

“I didn’t even hurt you!”

Fenrir said.

It was a strange conversation, as if the winners and losers were reversed.

Fenrir swung his blood fang at the fallen Shadow.

The blood fang easily cleaved Shadow in half, and carved a deep cut in the ground. However, no blood came out of Shadow’s body.

Instead, his body faintly disappeared.

“Just a shadow huh...”

Fenrir muttered, as if giving up.

“I was shown a beautiful sword.”

A voice came from the mist.

Tap tap tap, nine Shadow appeared with nine footsteps.

“In just one try...”

Fenrir took a deep breath.

Nine black swords extended. They danced in the mist like dragons.

“Incredible!”

Fenrir’s voice had a hint of excitement in it.

“Hidden technique... *Shadow’s* Atomic.” (空蝉のアトミック

Then, nine dragons devoured Fenrir.

The first bit his right arm, the second his left arm.

The third chewed off his right leg, the fourth his left.

The fifth and sixth cut both torsos, the seventh got the chest, and the eighth severed the neck.

And... The ninth devoured the head.

“Are you still breathing?”

Shadow spoke to the ninth head.

“*Goff*... In the end, I saw the peak of power... You showed me something good.”

Fenrir said in a low voice.

“There is no such thing as a peak of power.”

Shadow said in a bored tone.

“What do you mean? You’re one of the...”

“Above the peak, there is an even higher peak. That’s all...”

“What...?”

“People stop walking when they think they’re at the peak.”

“I see, so that’s why I...

Fenrir’s face showed regret.

“...I still haven’t seen the peak.”

And then the ninth dragon’s jaws closed.

Fenrir’s head shattered. Shadow shook out his long jet-black coat and disappeared into the depths of the white mist.

“W-Wait, Shadow!”

Alexia shouted. Shadow stopped in the mist.

“Tell me, who are you? What are you fighting for!?”

Alexia waited for an answer.

But Shadow turned away and didn’t answer.

“I want to protect this country! I don’t want my loved ones to feel sad! That’s why I decided to fight! Are you!? Can we trust you!?”

“Stay out of it... I told you so.”

“This is not the time for that! We fought to the death! If we were as strong as you, it might be a small matter. We might be insignificant. But... Weak people like me are also fighting to stay alive!”

Shadow slowly turned around.

His blood-red eyes looked at Alexia.

“We remove obstacles for our own purposes. That’s all...”

He said in a low voice, as if echoing from the distant depths.

“What is your purpose... Shadow, what are you going to do to this world!?”

Hearing Alexia’s question, Shadow’s expression moved for the first time.

He gave a small smile.

Then he swung his jet-black sword to the side. Beyond him was a terrifying device in the mist.

A metallic sound rang out and the device split into two.

“My necklace...”

Looking at it, Alexia and Claire’s necklaces had fallen off.

“Shadow!”

When looking back, Shadow was already gone. No trace of him could be found anywhere.

“If only I were stronger...”

Alexia clenched her fists tighter.

“Claire-san... Are you okay?”

Cristina supported Claire.

“Y-Yes...”

Claire said, holding her stomach. She might need medical treatment.

“Princess Alexia, we need to get out of here soon. But I don’t know where the exit is...”

Just then, footsteps sounded through the fog.

“Hey, I finally found you guys...!”

From there, a short girl appeared, it was Nina.

“Nina... Thank goodness, where have you been?”

Claire’s face broke into a sad smile.

“Sorry, sorry, I barely escaped Isaac, but I got lost. I found my way out.”

Hehehe, Nina laughed and pointed towards the exit.

“You’re so reliable, can we go?”

Alexia said that and turned to leave. At that moment, Nina moved quickly.

First, Alexia fell. Next, Claire and Cristina fell almost simultaneously.

It was a very fast pace.

Nina looked at the three unconscious people and muttered.

“Gosh, I have to lose the role to play.”

She let out a small sigh and changed her voice toward the fog.

“All preparations are ready... Zeta-sama.”

And then, a golden-haired beastkin and a pink-blonde haired girl appeared.

.

“Good job, besides, why don’t you go into the Shadow Garden too?”

Victoria spoke to Nina.

“You can become a Numbers in no time...”

Nina looked at Zeta in confusion.

“Nina shouldn’t be in the Shadow Garden. Precisely because she can move on her own, she didn’t betray us.”

Zeta said.

“In that case, I’ll continue as before.”

“Yes. Be Claire-sama’s best friend like you always have. Until the time comes...”

“...Okay.”

Nina made a white robe out of slime and pulled the hood over her head. She then lifted the unconscious Claire and proceeded to the door at the end of the shrine.

Zeta gave instructions and set Claire onto a pedestal with ancient letters engraved on it.

When she poured her magic into the pedestal, flames ignited on both sides of the door.

“There’s no turning back now, is there?”

Nina asked Zeta.

“Yes.”

“But Alpha-sama’s policy...”

“Alpha is naive. With her way, the bad guys came to power and the world repeated the same mistakes. So we will rule the world... Let no more mistakes be made.”

Zeta stared at the fire on the pedestal. She looked out from the blazing fire as if she was contemplating something.

“With eternal life, Shadow-sama will become a god. This world does not need a holy religion. We will teach a new teaching.”

Victoria said, her eyes shining with excitement.

“Is this really okay?”

“This is our mission.”

Muttering that, Zeta poured magic power into the pedestal.

The magic letters on the pedestal danced, leading to a door sealed with chains.

The chains creaked and squeaked as they glowed.

“Gwu... Gah...! Gah...!”

Claire, who was glued to the pedestal, trembled.

She opened her red eyes and screamed, her face bruised in pain.

“Aaaaauuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh!!!”

“Claire!!!”

Nina approached Claire.

“Zeta-sama, Claire!”

“It’s just rejection. It will subside soon.”

“But...”

“Her body is essential for controlling the resurrected Diabolos.”

And the chains disintegrated bit by bit.

A new magic circle appeared in Claire’s right hand.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!”

Claire shouted.

At the same time, the chains shattered and the innermost door opened.

There was nothing there. Only endless darkness.

Claire’s magic circle shone strongly.

“It worked.”

Victoria smiled sweetly.

“Her right arm and left arm are united. Nina, stay near Claire-sama and keep an eye out.”

Zeta carefully examined the magic circle engraved on Claire.

“Is this... your choice, Zeta-sama...”

Nina muttered to herself. She wiped Claire’s unconscious sweat from her face.

“Alpha and I... We’ll see which choice is right in time.”

With that, Zeta turned around and walked away.

“Until then, we lurk in the shadows...”

She then disappeared into the deepest darkness.

* * *

I was in an empty space.

I felt satisfied because it had been a long time since I had a good fight and good role-playing.

That terrorist old man’s sword was quite interesting. That’s called old wisdom.

I tried that opportunity because it was cool, but thanks to that I was able to connect with the best end result.

Learning the enemy’s techniques in the fight and using them to fight back. It was also emotionally charged.

Suzuki’s performance was also very good.

In my opinion, by playing as him, the depth of Shadow also increased. He appears and disappears. Where there is light, there is shadow.

I was thinking about that, and before I knew it, I was already here.

“This...”

I looked around.

The place looks familiar, the place where I met little Violet.

“Hey, we meet again.”

In the center of the white space, there was a little girl hugging her knees.

She was covered in scars.

“Are you okay?”

I flowed magic power into her and healed her wounds.

“Ugh...”

The girl raised her face.

Her face was red with tears of blood.

“...Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. What happened?”

“Nothing. Same as usual.”

“I see.”

“Yes.”

She looked at me and smiled.

“We finally meet again, Onii-chan.”

“Finally?”

“Because my power is strong at the center.”

“Hmm... Ah right, this.”

Saying that, I took out a red gem from my pocket.

“This is important to you, right?”

“...Are you sure?”
“One hundred million *zeni*. Installments are also possible.”

“Thank you.”

Then the girl received the red gem.

“I’ve been waiting for this.”

“Yes? If I may know what it is?”

“This is...”

The girl laughed.

The edges of her lips lifted up like a crescent moon.

The girl’s face contorted like an ugly monster, and then a powerful magic power overflowed.

The white space became completely black.

The girl moved her lips and muttered.

[My hatred.]

I didn’t hear her voice, but the girl must have said so.

And then, a black whirlpool of emotions formed.

Men, women, old people and children appeared one after another to insult the girl. But the next moment, they were turned into lumps of flesh torn apart by an unknown monster.

Hundreds and thousands kept repeating themselves, and suddenly I found myself standing on the roof of the school.

That was the place where I first met little Violet.

I could see the sun setting in the distance.

An ordinary school, a peaceful school.

“Hmm... Maybe I shouldn’t have given that to her?”

I tilted my head.

* * *

The silver-haired girl stared at the schoolyard with her red eyes.

“All the Knights could get from their investigation was the testimonies of the students. No evidence was found....”

The silver-haired girl leaned against the window of the empty classroom and was dazed.

“So, why was I called here?”

Besides the silver-haired girl, there was an ordinary boy with black hair in the classroom.

“Because you’re also involved.”

“I told you, I’m sleeping in the dormitory and not doing anything...”

“Only Claire hasn’t woken up since then. The Order wants to talk to you about it.”

“Oh, about my sister. But I don’t know anything about it, so I don’t have anything to tell them.”

“Yes, you do. You really don’t know anything. You don’t know what’s going on in this world, how deep the darkness of this world is...”

The silver-haired girl chuckled when she said that.

“That’s why there’s no point in asking me.”

“I don’t expect the Order to gain anything either. This is just a formality.”

“...That’s all.”

The black-haired boy said resignedly.

The cold winter wind blew in through the window and brushed against the girl’s beautiful silver hair

“It’s cold. Close the window, please.”

“Hey, Pochi.”

The silver-haired girl ignored the black-haired boy’s request and continued talking.

“I really envy you, you’re so calm.”

“Is that sarcasm?”

“No, I just want peace, that’s all.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

When the black-haired boy replied, the silver-haired girl smiled.

The black-haired boy was called from outside the classroom.

“Alright then. The Knights are calling me, I’ll go first.”

The black-haired boy put his hand on the classroom door.

“Hey, Pochi.”

The silver-haired girl stopped him.

“...Do you ever wish to have eternal life?”

“I want it very much.”

The boy’s head flipped at an incredible speed.

“S-So.”

“If I could get it, I could destroy the world.”

“I should never have asked you.”

“If you find it, please let me know.”

The black-haired boy said that with a straight face and left the classroom.

The silver-haired girl who was left alone let out a small sigh.

“Eternal life... Shadow is not an arrogant person like Pochi. If Shadow wants eternal life, then the world...”

The silver-haired girl looked up at the sky.

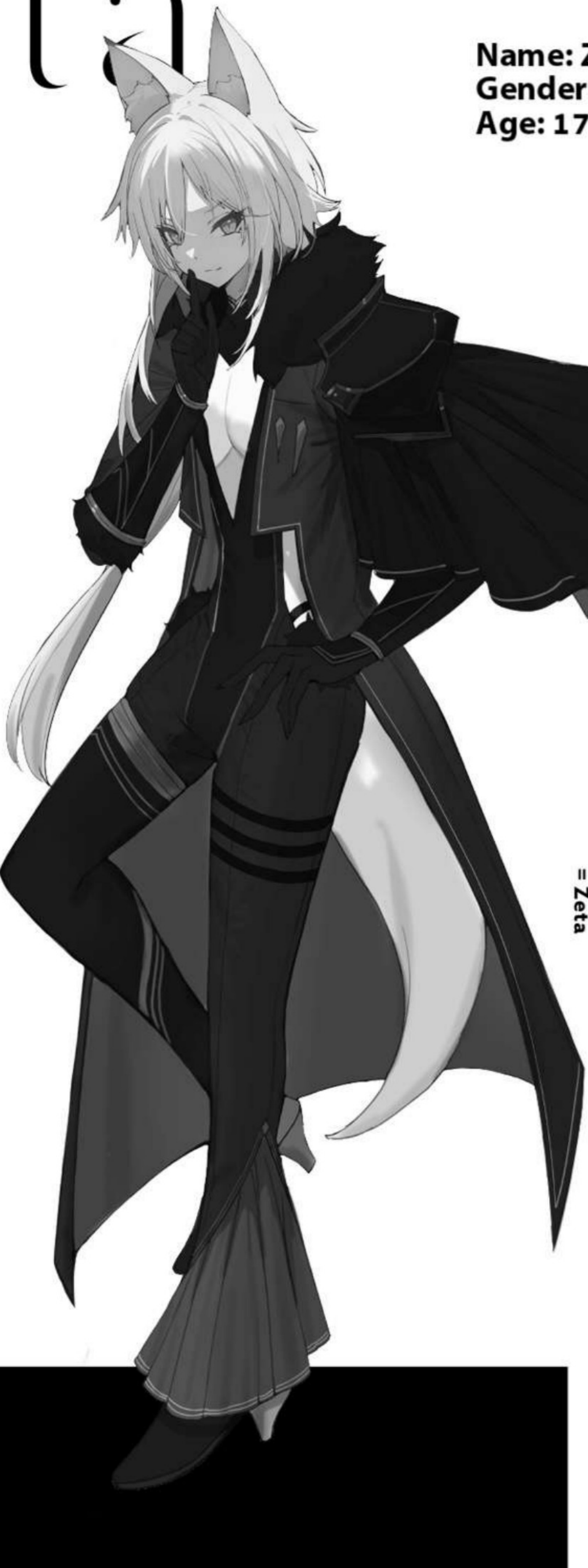
There the gray sky was overcast as if it was endless.

Appendix

Zeta

Name: Zeta
Gender: Female
Age: 17

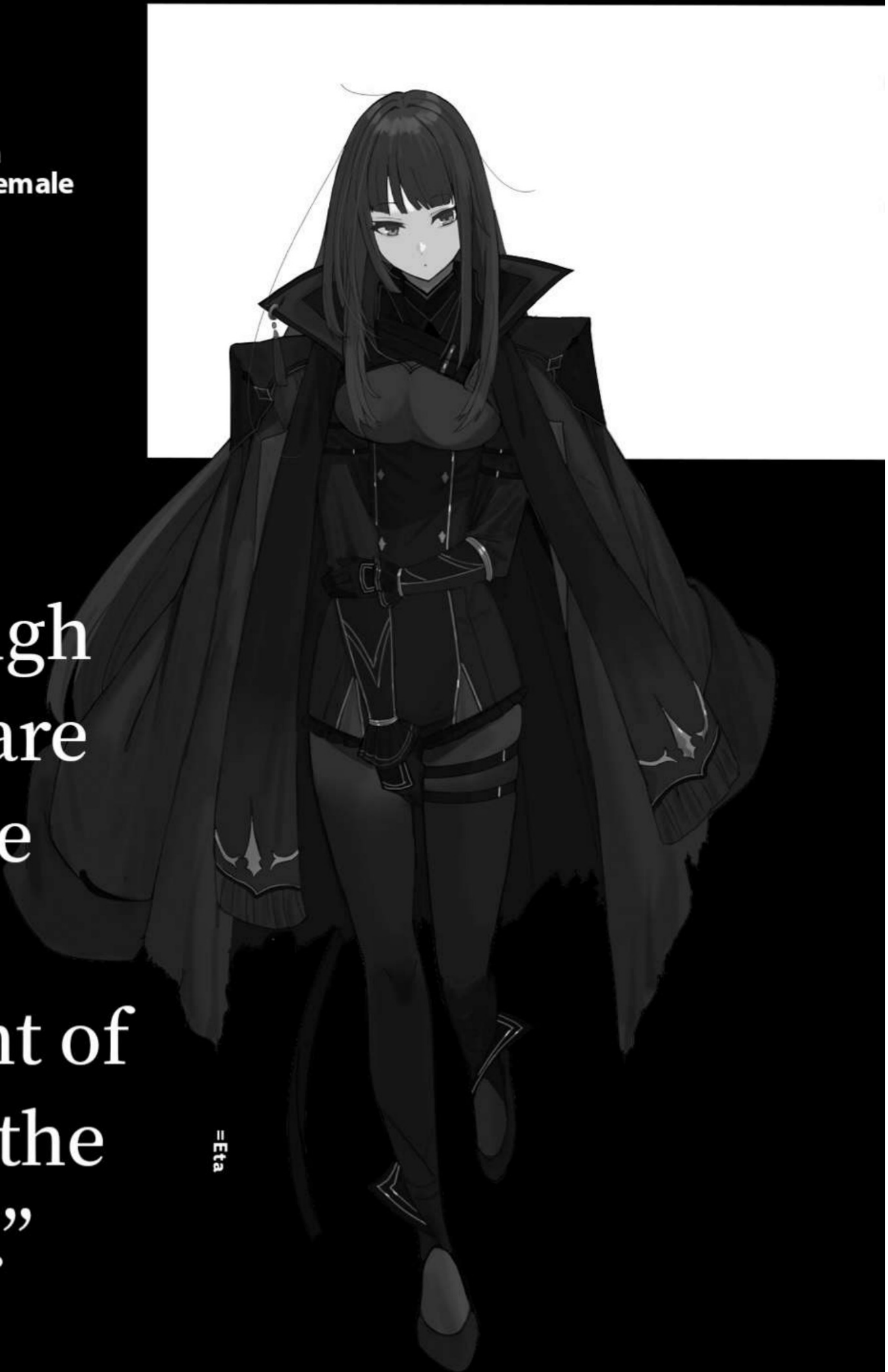
“All the guilt are mine to bear.”



A cool and collected girl from the golden panther clan, seated in the sixth seat of the Seven Shadows. She is skilled with various weapons, such as swords and chakrams, and possesses a natural talent known as “heavenly gift,” but her short attention span makes it difficult for her to master any one thing. In Shadow Garden, she uses her excellent sense to excel as a spy, with her own network of information and subordinates scattered throughout the land.

Eta

Name: Eta
Gender: Female
Age: 17



"Even though sacrifices are inevitable in the development of wisdom in the shadows."

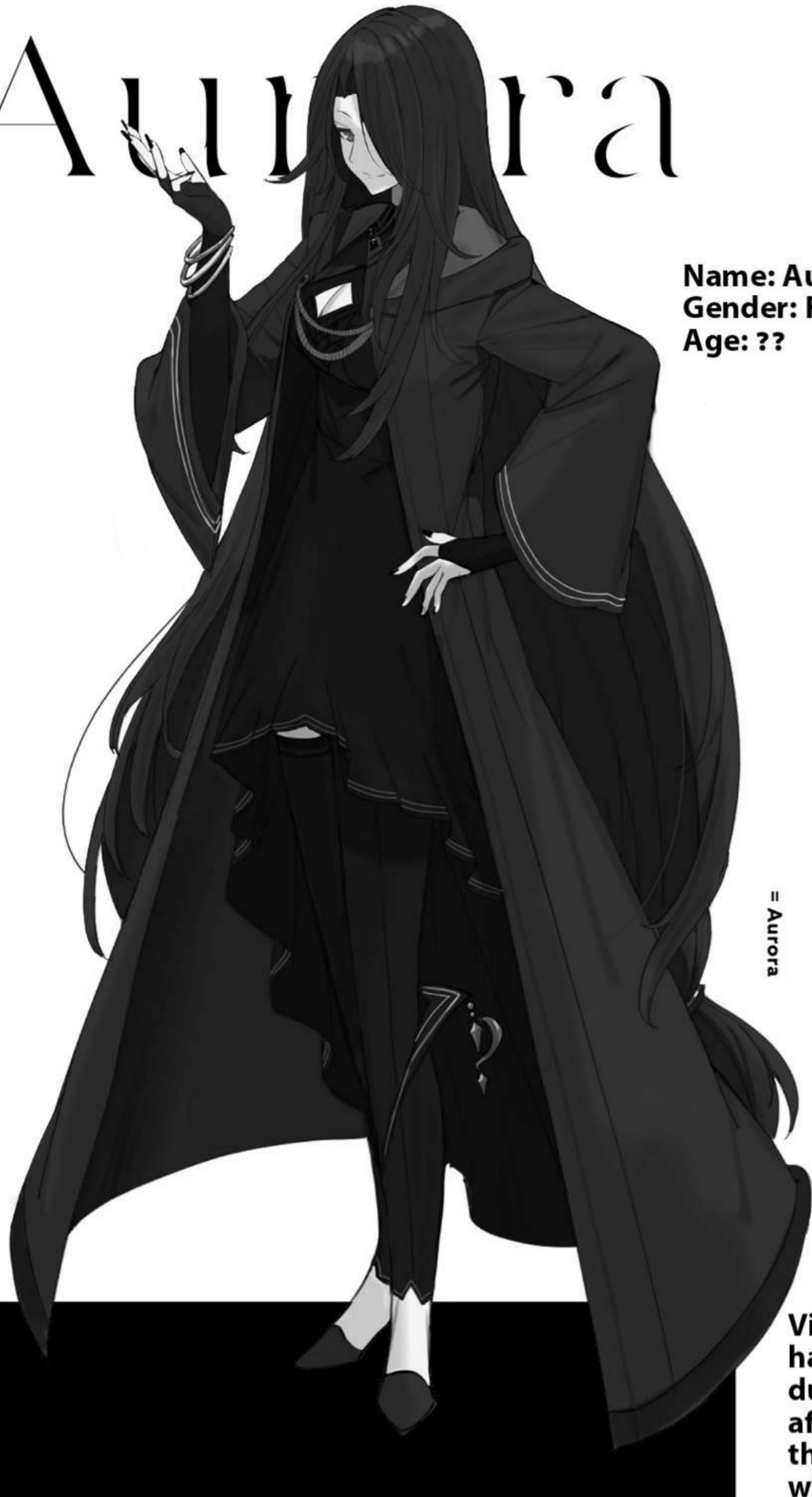
=Eta

The seventh seat of the 'Seven Shadows' is an elven girl who is quiet, lazy, and loves to indulge in lazy sleep. In 'Shadow Garden,' she mainly handles research and development, and contributes to various inventions based on 'Wisdom of the Shadows.' For the sake of research, she possesses a psychopathic side that does not hesitate to make sacrifices, and shows strong attachment to uncovering 'Wisdom of the Shadows.' Although Shido has a mysterious sense of familiarity with her, saying "Eta is just like me, only sacrificing everything else for the sake of a small beloved thing", he handles her roughly due to her persistence in seeking 'Wisdom of the Shadows'

Aurora

“I'll lend you a little bit of strength.”

Name: Aurora
Gender: Female
Age: ??



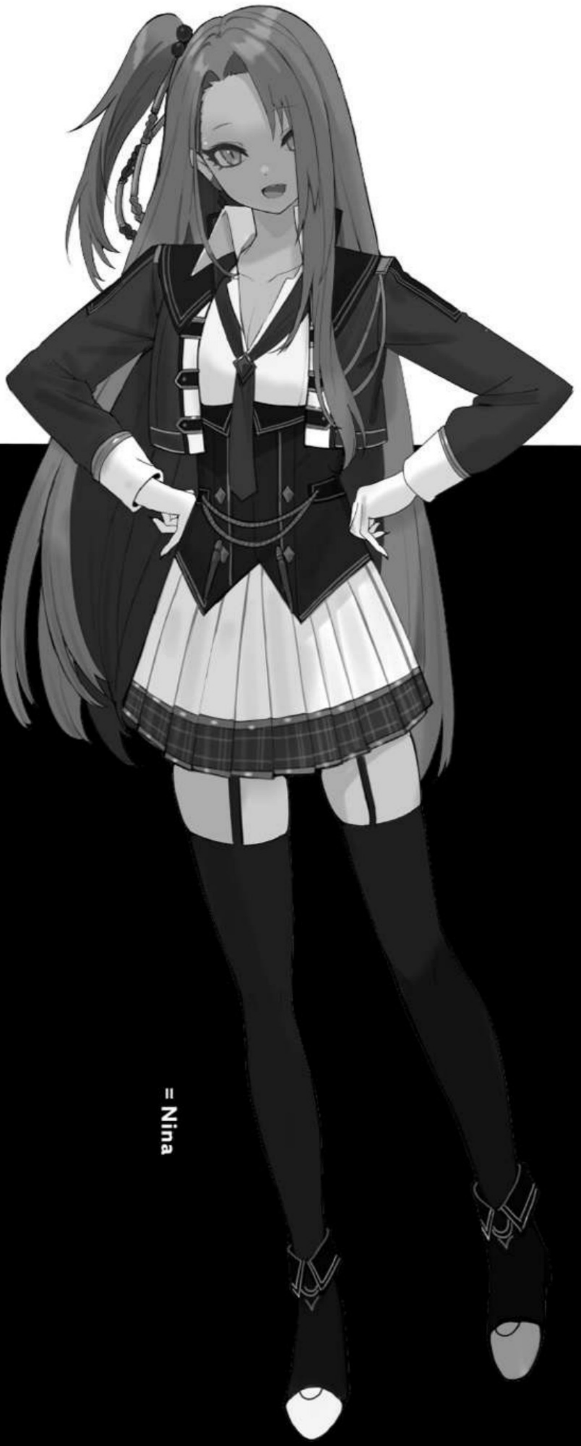
= Aurora

Violet-eyed mysterious beauty. She has the ability to converse with Cid during battle and is called Violet-san affectionately by Cid. However, it seems that her true identity is that of a witch who was called “Witch of Calamity” over 1000 years ago. She seems to be sealed somewhere and her actions are restricted, but currently part of her consciousness is dwelling in Claire and she can be spoken to as a “ghost-san.” She also supports her power in times of crisis, but often run out of magical energy.

Nina

Name: Nina
Gender: Female
Age: 18

“What a completely pointless role, right?”



Claire's best friend, a 3rd-year student at Midgar Royal Spellsword Academy. She uses the first-person pronoun “boku.” Although she has a small build, her style is very good, and she dresses in a way that shows it off. She often treats Cid to school meals, and is attentive. She is obedient enough to do whatever is asked of her. Sneaking into the forbidden bookshelf, taking out forbidden books, doing homework in proxy, making cheating papers. Her true identity is Zeta's personal subordinate and she is observing Claire for the mission. She is not a member of “Shadow Garden” and acts independently. She has a mysterious large wound on her left chest.

Journal

As instructed by Alpha-sama, I included research no
tedious, I was willing to do it if it meant increasing n

Yesterday, I slept for twelve hours and spent an hou
work. It was basically just for the day.

Then..... Hmm, I also wanted to say something about
the other world.

It was damaged, and I believe it was due to electrom

Although repairing it is impossible with our curren
maybe in 20 years?

But I think it would be faster and cheaper to create a
than trying to repair the original.

The materials used are also more useful, as analysis
With our current technology, it would be easy to pro

We are also analyzing materials made from refined

All of that could lead to further technological innova

I also want to tell you about the otherworldly lifefor

tes in my report. Although it was a bit
ny research funds.

r on research and another hour on other

the stuff that Beta brought back from

agnetic radiation.

t technology, it's possible in the future-

similar product using magic technology

has shown that metal is light and strong.
cess and mix it with mithril.

ils and resins.

tions. It's more or less like that.

m that Beta brought with her.

Eta's Research Journal

The Eminence in Shadow Vol 5

著イータ

Her body structure is more similar to humans than
power, but her magic circuitry is underdeveloped.
life forms. This was quite interesting.

Beta stopped me from dissecting it, which I regrett
killing it.

However, I understand that sacrifices are necessary

I have no doubt that Master's reason for going to an
wisdom. We must not waste Master's will, and so I
to analyze the wisdom of the other world.

My analysis of these wisdoms has shown me that M

...All knowledge is interconnected. Master once said

As long as technology is well developed, we will alw
technology is more developed in our world and scie
other worlds. Many parts of the two are interconne

Master himself realized this and brought much of h
learned in the Elven capital was immature compare

What exactly is contained inside Master's head? Tha
to dissect it.

elves or beastkin, and she has magic
nly similar, but not the same as other

d because I could have done it without

for the development of shadow wisdom.

ther world was to bring back this
sked for permission to perform surgery

aster's words are true.

so.

ays be at the same point. Magical
ntific technology is more developed in
ted.

is wisdom to us. The knowledge I had
l to Master's wisdom.

t's the biggest mystery right now. I want

Eta's Research Journal

The Eminence in Shadow Novel 5

著 イータ

Now, how does Master intend to move forward? Wil
Kingdom to break free from the Cult's grip, or does
everything? Both sounded like a hassle, but Master v
troublesome, like clearing land.

...I'm getting tired of writing.

Well, if I write this much, I'm sure Alpha-sama will i

Fufufu... I'm going to bed.

l this be an opportunity for the Midgar
he intend to destroy and rebuild
was kind. If it were me, it would be

ncrease the research funds as well.

Eta's Research Journal

The Eminence in Shadow Vol 5

著 イータ

Afterword

Thank you for purchasing Volume 5 of “Kage no Jitsuryokusha ni Naritakute!”. I apologize for making you wait.

It has been more than a year and a half since the previous volume was published, and in that time, there have been developments such as TV anime and video game adaptations.

In October 2022, the TV anime aired smoothly. As the original author, I was happy to be involved in its production, and I believe it has become a very outstanding anime.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone on the anime staff. Their hard work and dedication are all greatly appreciated.

And also, Master of Garden, a game project based on this work, has quietly been developed.

In Shicikage Retsuden, which tells the adventure story of Seven Shadows and others, I have also supervised all the stories.

In addition, in the process of revisiting the main story, I insisted on including scenarios of my own writing.

Currently, we are in the process of sending them out.

There are many stories that were not included in the original work, so I hope you can play it with pleasure. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the game staff.

Their hard work and dedication are greatly appreciated.

In addition, it has been decided that the Alpha and Beta will be made into figures. These figures are of excellent quality.

In addition, we have also decided on a number of other projects, such as product production, and many things have happened in the past year and a half.

Among them, the editor in charge of supporting the depiction of the fifth volume. And Touzai-sensei, who consistently produces the best illustrations and brings the world of “Kage no Jitsuryokusha ni Naritakute!” to life. Araki-san of Balcolony, who has adorned this book with beautiful designs. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has waited patiently for me.

Thank you very much!

Furthermore, I am working on the sixth volume with the aim of delivering it faster than the fifth volume! See you soon!

Daisuke Aizawa